The Journal of San Diego History

Founded in 1928 as the San Diego Historical Society, today’s San Diego History Center is one of the largest and oldest historical organizations on the West Coast. It houses vast regionally significant collections of objects, photographs, documents, films, oral histories, historic clothing, paintings, and other works of art. The San Diego History Center operates two major facilities in national historic landmark districts: The Research Library and History Museum in Balboa Park and the Serra Museum in Presidio Park. The San Diego History Center presents dynamic changing exhibitions that tell the diverse stories of San Diego’s past, present, and future, and it provides educational programs for K-12 schoolchildren as well as adults and families.

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Front Cover: Scenes from Rancho La Puerta, 2016.

Back Cover: The San Diego River following its historic course to the Pacific Ocean. The San Diego Trolley and a local highrise flank the river.

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Rancho La Puerta: Where the Fitness Revolution Began
By Iris Engstrand

Introduction

As the sun rises and casts its shadows over a peaceful, picturesque valley on the outskirts of the small Mexican town of Tecate, a day at Rancho La Puerta begins. This ranch, unlike others in the vicinity, is a unique experiment in effective living. Although called a health resort, or a fitness spa, it is much more than that—it is a revelation, the opportunity for a new beginning, indeed, a new life. The history of Rancho La Puerta is the personal story of its founders Deborah Shainman and Edmond Bordeux Szekely (pronounced Say-Kay), their relationship with the Mexican people of Tecate, and their dedication to centuries-old fitness concepts drawn from a collective knowledge of humanity. Originally the ranch, as the Essene School of Life, was an experiment; today it embodies the successful results of that experiment.

Ahead of its time even at its founding, Rancho La Puerta remains in the forefront of healthful nutrition and physical well being. Ideas that were once the providence of “health nuts” have become personal goals for the thousands who

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have passed through its gate on the road to renewal. Perhaps Rancho La Puerta’s secret is that it started out as a school and maintained many of the early teachings implanted at its founding, and continued as a learning institution dedicated to the transformation of the mind as well as the body. Deborah Szekely, her daughter Sarah Livia, and their closely-knit Mexican family, expertly carry on the Rancho La Puerta traditions. This is their story.¹

Family Background

Deborah Shainman, the daughter of Rebecca Sudman and Harry Shainman, natives of Ukraine and Poland, was born in New York on May 3, 1922. Her father, a tailor in Brooklyn, provided a comfortable home for Deborah and her younger brother Joseph. Her mother, a registered nurse and vice-president of the New York Vegetarian Society, was a kind and selfless person known for her soothing ways and healing touch. Because of several serious illnesses, Rebecca had been converted in 1924 to a natural, self-help way of living. She shunned meat and fed her family raw vegetables, fruit, and nuts. Deborah recalled that almost every weekend they hiked to a different health camp. Midweek, the family listened to the radio and she “fell asleep listening to health lectures all over Manhattan.”²

After the stock market crash in 1929, the Shainmans found that fresh fruits and nuts were not only expensive, but rarely available. In 1930, when the Great Depression began to inflict severe financial hardships to many in the United States, the family was curiously fortunate. Harry Shainman took a courageous step and invested their remaining funds in a steamship ticket for Tahiti, moving the family to the mid-Pacific French island to pursue their vegetarian diet, escape the rigors of New York winters, and take part in the unhurried life of Polynesia. This event irrevocably transformed their lives.³ To maintain themselves there, Harry sold coconuts while Rebecca delivered babies. Deborah, a bright and inquiring student, attended a convent school where the official languages were Tahitian and French. Once adjusted, she looked upon the move as an adventure. Deborah, an avid reader,
recalled, “I guess it all began at the school in Tahiti, because there I had to learn not by listening but by watching.... Direct observation is the key to everything I have learned.” This was also where she made the acquaintance of a fascinating European professor of primitive cultures, Dr. Edmond Bordeaux Szekely.

The professor, as he was called throughout his life, came from an educated, middle-class family of Hungarian and Jewish background. His ancestors in Transylvania had enjoyed landholdings dating from the time when the Roman Empire encompassed much of Eastern Europe. Transylvania (meaning beyond the forest) was developed into a distinctive autonomous unit with its own governor, constitution, and united nobility descended from Saxon, Szekler, and Magyar colonists. The Szekler were Magyar frontier guards sent to Transylvania to protect its eastern flank. At earlier times under Hungarian domination, the territory of Transylvania became part of the country of Romania.

Edmond, born March 5, 1905, was multi-lingual even as a young child. He attended local schools in Cluj, the historic capital of Transylvania, located some 200 miles northwest of Bucharest. He received a bachelor’s degree in a combined major of sociology, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy from the University at Cluj. As a professor, Szekely lectured in France and Switzerland on simple, natural methods of healing, and developed a holistic approach toward medicine. He deplored the lack of essential vitamins and minerals in commercial foods and advocated that “every family have a miniature garden in which to work a
few minutes daily, preferably in a bathing suit. These gardens yield good vegetables and the one who works them gains moderate exercise in the sun." Szekely warned, however, that no more than twenty minutes sun exposure was necessary for sufficient vitamin D.

During the late 1930s, the professor became director of a British International Health and Education Center in Leatherhead, England. Szekely lectured and published books with C.W. Daniel Co. Ltd. on a variety of topics in several languages. His main interest centered on factors affecting the lifestyle and nutrition of primitive peoples throughout the world. He did extensive research into the cultures and traditions of the Aztecs in Mexico, the Maoris in New Zealand, and the Polynesian peoples in Tahiti. Prior to World War II, Szekely gave up his position in England, along with interests in Nice where he lived in a villa overlooking the Mediterranean, in order to pursue his studies in Mexico. He also left behind a health resort that he had founded at Aspremont in the Alps.

The Founding of Rancho La Puerta

Following their initial acquaintance in Tahiti, Dr. Szekely and the Shainmans continued their friendship during the summers at various health camps ranging from Lake Elsinore, California, to the banks of Río Corona in Tamaulipas, Mexico. In 1939, when the professor’s secretary returned to England, Deborah began to attend to the practical details of her mentor’s life. She had graduated from high school and decided that the professor and his colorful group of health faddists were more interesting than attending college. Together she and Edmond made plans for a permanent school site in England. Their close association led to romance and they were married on December 26, 1939. Because of wartime conditions Szekely could not safely return to Europe, and lacking a proper visa to enter the United States, could not legally settle there. He knew that Tecate, Mexico, had a temperate climate with maximum sun that would be conducive to healthy living. Through a curious set of circumstances—a shipwreck and a broken-down bus—he ended up at Nogales, Mexico, and from there walked across the hot Sonora desert through Mexicali and on to Tecate, where he arrived on June 4, 1940. He first met Don Felipe Cipriano and his wife, a kindly couple who gave him food and a place
to sleep, but more importantly, introduced him to their nephew Cipriano Federico who owned the ranch across the road. The professor recounted the incident:

...he was very jovial and hospitable and showed me around his ranch, which was much larger than I had imagined. Walking along, we came to an unusual oak tree, venerable and ancient, whose trunk reached upward only to curve into a stately arch and enter the ground again. Almost at the very point where the trunk reached again to the ground was a well, also very ancient-looking, I asked Don Cipriano about it and he told me an interesting story. The well was indeed old, and no one could remember a time when it had ever gone dry. It was said that even the great drought of the long-ago past, when the Cochimi Indians were still sovereigns of this land, this well—the well of La Puerta—had always been a source of water. It was called the well of La Puerta because of the natural arch of the oak tree, forming a kind of gate, and the Spanish word for gate is *La Puerta*.9

After his tour of the ranch, Professor Szekely negotiated the rental of a dilapidated old barn and a surrounding area of approximately 20 x 25 yards for about ten pesos a month. A search for food brought him to the house of Cipriano’s brother, Ignacio Federico (called Nacho), who offered to sell him a
quart of goat’s milk a day along with some grapes from the nearby vineyards. During the next few days, Szekely explored the fertile, green valley and found a creek called Arroyo de Cuchuma, which took its name from the majestic mountain at the northwestern end of the valley, long revered by the local Indians as a holy site. Upon climbing Mt. Cuchuma and looking over the valley of La Puerta, he decided to establish an Essene School of Life, where he would not only write books about the ancient Essenes, but “would have students from all over the world, incorporating them into a cooperative way of living in a self-subsistent, creative atmosphere, similar to the Essene community at Qumran at the Dead Sea.” The Mexican town of Tecate was even in the exact same north latitude as Galilee, where Jesus of Nazareth had spent the greater part of his ministry. Moreover, Szekely’s school would have the advantage of “the perfect climate and abundant gifts of nature of the green La Puerta valley, instead of the harsh and arid desert.”

After adding windows and doors to the barn, Professor Szekely ordered 100 pounds of soybeans from a friend at Lake Elsinore and obtained 100 pounds of wheat from a local source. He soaked the soy beans and wheat, germinating the grains, mixed the two together, ran them through a small meat grinder obtained from the Tecate hardware store, and formed tortillas from the resulting paste. An old recipe found in Professor Szekely’s book called The Zend Avesta of Zarathustra instructed that they be baked on hot, flat rocks to produce a delicious bread. After planting some fast-growing onion and radish seeds to add vegetables to his diet of goat’s milk, grapes, and bread, the professor was ready to set up permanent housekeeping.

Deborah, then just eighteen years old, arrived in Tecate two days after her husband via a more direct route. She and Edmond had received a 1928 Cadillac as a wedding gift from a good friend who had been a member of the Río Corona
Rancho La Puerta

The car, though old in years was in excellent shape, and, as Deborah recalled, had plush silver upholstery and cut-glass bud vases between its side windows. After a short reunion on the American side of the border, the Szekelys headed down the dusty, corrugated road to Rancho La Puerta and began life in the small barn that Deborah converted into a livable home. The Cadillac remained their trusted vehicle for several years.

Once settled, the Szekelys accepted the services of Bud Schroeder, a young German and former seminar student, who stayed at the ranch as a handyman and general helper during its formative period. The purchase of Nacho’s goat, and the acquisition of a half-wild, half-domestic cat called Ahriman, rounded out the unusual group and were on hand for the beginning of a great experiment. From a small desk in the made-over barn, Professor Szekely sketched out his plans to found the Essene School of Life and publish a series of manuscripts about the ancient Mayans, Toltecs, and Aztecs. He proposed to give daily lectures, establish large-scale gardening, and set up a clinical laboratory for medical research to prove the ancient methods of the Essenes. He also planned “for a good number of little cabins and some larger constructions, like a library, providing appropriate accommodations for the people who would follow the different categories of nutrition, treatment by biochemistry, heliotherapy, hydrotherapy, etc.” Szekely wrote a long letter to his former publisher in England describing these ambitious plans and outlining the scenic wonders of Tecate, where he intended to wait out World War II.

The lack of accommodations and amenities was no deterrent to the few enthusiastic pioneers who arrived in Tecate during the summer of 1941, pitching their tents at Rancho La Puerta. Some purchased lumber in Tecate and put up permanent dwellings modeled after the first Essene cabins, while those in tents suffered discomfort from the fall rains. Deborah kept busy baking Zarathustra bread and obtaining fresh supplies of goat’s milk, vegetables, and grape juice. She attended to the practical aspects of living while the professor lectured on the advantages of a cooperative venture and a Spartan lifestyle. Despite the difficulties in obtaining certain supplies, more cabins appeared and Rancho La Puerta became a reality.

Tecate: A Town at the Crossroads

Tecate, Mexico, is a small industrial city of some 70,000 people. Located south of the international border, thirty-three miles east of Tijuana, it overlooks a valley flanked by rolling hills and spectacular mountains. It is 1,800 feet above sea level with a dry Mediterranean climate and summer temperatures ranging up to 95°F
and higher. In the beginning, the land was inhabited by Cochimí Indians, a hunting and gathering group linguistically related to the Yuman-speaking nations of the Colorado River and surrounding desert. Descendants of these original native inhabitants continue to live in an area south of Tecate. The United States border runs along the northern part of the valley and downtown Tecate, built adjacent to the dividing line, is about 40 miles east of San Diego. On the Mexican side, highways serve outlying agricultural regions and connect Tecate with Mexicali to the east and Ensenada to the south. An express toll road runs west to Tijuana. The existence of these crossroads was crucial to Tecate’s early survival, but today’s large brewery, coffee-processing plant, electronics assembly plants, Rancho La Puerta, and other service-related industries ensure the city’s continuing growth.

Spanish soldiers, missionaries, and settlers arrived in the area in mid-1769 and continued the founding of a series of missions from San Diego to north of San Francisco. Previously the northern Baja California missions had been established by the Dominican order following expulsion of the Jesuits. Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821 and encouraged the granting of private ranchos to populate the vast lands of California. Don Juan Lorenzo Bandini, a San Diego resident, was granted the 4,439 acres Rancho San Jose de Tecate in 1833. His nearest neighbors were members of the Pico family of Rancho Jamul. The Franciscan missions were turned over to secular authorities in 1834 and natives lost the protection of the religious arm of the government. By 1837, the local Cochimí, displaced and unhappy, joined the Yuma tribes and plotted to exterminate the ranchers. Indians attacked Bandini’s ranch, destroyed the buildings, and dispersed the herds. They burned the mission at Guadalupe to the southwest, killed three soldiers, and continued their plundering for the next several years. The Bandini family moved back to San Diego and offered the ranch for sale in 1855.

The U.S.-Mexican War, which permanently separated Tecate and all of Baja California from Alta California, ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo on February 2, 1848. There were several proposals to draw the boundary line farther to the south, or farther to the north, but in the end the line approximated the 1772 division between the Dominican mission territory of the south and the
Franciscan missions to the north; Mt. Cuchuma was split in two, with its peak just on the American side. U.S. Calvary troops were sent to Campo, Calexico, Yuma, and other border areas to maintain order. Troops were also stationed in Tecate, California, during World War II to maintain neutrality of the border. Camp Lockett, the cavalry training area at Campo, remained until after World War II. When horses became obsolete from a military standpoint, the camp began to host Italian prisoners-of-war.

The border areas and Tijuana, with its gambling casino at Agua Caliente, provided an attraction for tourists. Prohibition in the United States gave rise to numerous bars in Tecate where Americans could drink and plot ways to smuggle liquor across the border. Customs officers were kept busy with the constant search for alcohol. Life returned to a slow pace during the depression years when wages tumbled, the prohibition amendment was repealed, and gambling was declared illegal by Mexican president Lazaro Cárdenas. Nevertheless, some development continued during the 1930s with the establishment of vegetable-oil processing plants, flourmills, and other light industry. The first malt processing plant in Baja California was established in Tecate in 1939 and border activity continued to thrive. In 1943, Cervecería Cuáhtemoc, a small brewery, was founded near the Tecate River. The naturally pure local water supply provided the key ingredient for making excellent beer, today marketed under the names Tecate, Carta Blanca, and Bohemia.

Tecate was a small but diversified Mexican town with a temperate climate, clear air, and friendly people, far from modern in the days before World War II.
With a population numbering about 400, it was an ideal setting for the kind of life envisioned by Professor Edmond Bordeaux Szekely when, on June 6, 1940, he showed his young wife Deborah their residence in the former barn at Rancho La Puerta.

**The Essene School of Life: *Siempre Mejor* (Always Better)**

In the beginning, Professor Szekely established the Essene School patterned after the simple life advocated by the Essene monks of pre-biblical days. As people began to hear about the school and arrive in significant numbers, he decided that everything should be organized on a cooperative basis with three categories of membership. Category B included all persons who came to improve their health, to study, and to receive the benefit of educational instruction. A payment of $12.50 per week covered their cost to the school, and they were obligated to contribute two and a half hours a day to educational and cultural activities. The work, as it evolved, included a variety of occupations. Some helped to print, staple and prepare the booklets for Professor Szekely’s lessons, others worked in the vegetable garden, did carpentry, prepared food, ran errands, helped to organize plays and musicals, and did whatever was necessary for the health, happiness and progress of the school.

The unique and long lasting relationship with the Mexican people began because of those in Category C. They paid $25.00 per week, making it possible...
Rancho La Puerta

to hire one Mexican worker to do the work that each of these guests would normally contribute. All of the Mexican workers together comprised Category A. By the fifth summer, there were some one hundred health enthusiasts living at Rancho La Puerta. They planted trees and vegetable gardens, worked diligently at improving their surroundings, and upheld the Essene goals of “a universal, liberal, humanitarian, educational center for the omnilateral study and optimal application of all the values of human culture.” The school announced its belief in the Fatherhood of God, the Motherhood of Nature, and the Brotherhood of Man. Their daily motto was “siempre mejor” (always better).

The original Essenes were a religious sect that flourished in Palestine from about the 2nd century BCE to the end of the first century CE. They clustered in secluded monastic communities in which property was held in common, manual labor was essential, and all details of daily life were regulated by officials. They observed the Law of Moses and professed belief in immortality and divine punishment for sin. The Sabbath was reserved for daylong prayer and meditation on the Torah. Common meals were taken in silence and the Essenes generally devoted themselves to ascetic lives of justice, piety and healthful living. Following the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the vicinity of Khirbet Qumran, scholars have debated whether or not the ancient Jewish sect situated there was Essenic.

The second summer at Rancho La Puerta was recalled by Deborah as “…one of the most gratifying experiences of my life.” The guests paid approximately
$18.75 per week and thrived on the daily routine of climbing the nearby mountain at the crack of dawn, eating mainly grapes, and working together under the hot sun in a remarkable spirit of community. The Tecate River had an unusual rock formation that created a refreshing “Roman Bath.” One of the disadvantages, however, was the lack of permanent dwellings on the ranch.

About this time, Deborah learned that the commanding officer at Camp Lockett, the U.S. Cavalry camp at Campo, had ordered thirty wooden packing crates that had been used to pack airplane engines to serve as horse stalls. Since they were about five feet wide and ten to twelve feet long, they were definitely too small for horses, but just maybe large enough for people. They were well built with inlaid linoleum and, after being declared war surplus, were available for purchase. Deborah gathered together most of the monetary resources of the group and determined that she could pay $27.00 per crate. Since no one else bid for them, she was the only purchaser. They had traded the 1928 Cadillac for a Model A flat bed truck in which they “trundled each packing case down, and those became our first houses.” They cut two or three windows and a door and furnished each with a surplus army cot and mattress, a chair, tin desk, and a small box for storage. The crates were arranged in an orderly pattern around the property and formed the nucleus of Rancho La Puerta.

As guests filled up the “houses,” the ranch brought in extra money. This
was used to construct the first permanent building—the library. The professor had amassed a large collection of books that he considered indispensable as guides to the Essene ideals. These included great works of philosophy, religion, literature, music, art, science, health, and hygiene. It housed the mimeograph and the Szekelys began to send out lectures to corresponding members who paid $10.00 per year to participate in the Essene teachings for the science of life. Based in “the pure and original intuitive knowledge which man once had of natural law,” these lessons were “reconstructed by Professor Szekely through scientific research, archeological finds, and philosophical interpretation … [They would] guide man in the realization of a more perfect physical, social and spiritual existence.”17 The Essenes believed in the power of human thought, truth over error, love, fraternity and cooperation, and the worth of the individual. Membership in the school grew along with the number of guests staying at the ranch.

Techniques, Cures, and Programs

Initially the professor and his followers tried different techniques for achieving a more perfect way of life. In one method they attempted to remain completely silent two days a week and then fast for varying periods of time. Deborah recalled that they gave “all kinds of mud baths to people who liked to bathe and compounded it and mixed it with sulphur, Epsom salts and all kinds of things.”18 They tried 30 to 40 different combinations of mud and chemicals and even tried sloshing people about in the mud. They finally abandoned the mud baths, but turned to a most interesting and long-lasting experiment known as the grape cure.

The “Original Biochemical Grape Cure” was a three-week session at the ranch for $75.00 and was popular during the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was based upon the practice of the ancient Essenes who, in their brotherhoods at the Dead Sea, cultivated grapes extensively. According to Professor Szekely, “the grape has a general cleansing quality enabling the system to throw off toxins and rebuild the blood cells. It augments assimilation, increases vitality and resistance to disease… The grape cure’s greatest achievement is the renewal of the blood corpuscles…Grapes are also naturally alkalizing and contain certain enzymes which improve gastric functions, and are beneficial even in cases of chronic constipation.”19 At Rancho La Puerta, “the biochemical grape cure made use of all the natural forces, sunshine, fresh air, outdoor living in the right climate, rest, relaxation and exercise, in balanced combinations.”

The daily program at Rancho La Puerta during the early years was carefully planned and consisted of the following routine:
**Daily Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Breakfast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Walk to Roman Bath, wading in wet sand of creek bed most of the way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Grape juice with biochemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:10 a.m.</td>
<td>10:50 a.m.—sunbath or cosmovital bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Grape juice with biochemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:00 noon</td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:00-3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Siesta, reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Grape juice with biochemicals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-3:45 p.m.</td>
<td>Walk along valley road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Report to nurse, check pulse, temperature, prepare symptom sheet for professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Dinner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:45-6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Siesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:30-8:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00-8:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Walk in the vineyard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Property Acquisition to Expand the Ranch**

By the end of the 1950s, many improvements had been made to upgrade the facilities at Rancho La Puerta. From the beginning, the Szekelys understood that to produce all that was necessary to sustain the community at the ranch, more land was required. Through a fortunate set of circumstances, this became possible as land became available. The nucleus of the ranch remained at “La Puerta” itself, which the professor purchased piece by piece from Don Cipriano Federico when he needed money, which was often. In order to provide the ranch residents with freshly-baked Zarathustrian bread, they purchased a small ranch eight miles away in *Valle Redondo* (Round Valley) called *Tres Piedras* from Odilon Meclis, a Mexican who left to trace his father’s ancestry (Macleish) in England. The 140-acre ranch had 80 acres of wheat and 30 acres of vineyards—perfect for providing the wheat sprouts and wheat greens for the healthful “chlorophyll cocktail,” flour for the bread, and grapes for the winter cure. Then, as the demand for grapes increased, the Szekelys discovered two more ranches covered with lush vineyards for sale by a Sr. Valadez whose dream was to move into the “big city” of Tecate. The 100-acre *Rancho Tres Lomas* (Three Hills), also in *Valle Redondo*, contained 40
acres of vineyards and 20 of wheat while Rancho Tres Vinas (Three Vines) nearby produced only grapes. Because these ranches differed in elevation from La Puerta, the grapes ripened at different times and ensured a much longer grape season. Most of the grapes were of the delicious purple Rosa de Peru variety derived from the Rosa d’Avignon of France. The Tecate vineyards had never been sprayed and were cultivated with a mule and old-fashioned plow. Another acquisition was from Gabriel Arce and called Rancho Tres Aguas (Three Waters) near Valle Las Palmas, four miles from La Puerta. These 250 acres, planted with 40 acres of oats and barley, contained 120 acres of pasture. The rancho took its name from a creek and permanent spring. The Szekelys used the ranch to keep beehives for the production of fresh honey. From this the professor developed a beverage called Hydromel. Rancho Bella Vista, planted entirely in corn, was acquired from Pasqual Cardenas, while Rancho Cuchuma, three miles from La Puerta at a higher elevation and nestled at the foot of the mountain, was perfect for their extensive orchards and vegetable gardens. The 330-acre Cuchuma or Tres Estrellas (Three Stars) was purchased from a Sr. Villareal who longed to move to Mexico City. The ranch had a reliable water supply.

The final purchase was Rancho Tacambaro, property that joined La Puerta on the northwest. It was owned by the former Mexican President, Lázaro Cárdenas. Another former president, Miguel Aleman, who owned an estate with a spacious summer home nearby, gave Rancho La Puerta a gift of 100 olive trees to be planted at Tacambaro.

These properties together comprised about 1200 acres and supported the activities of the Essene school and ranch complex. President Aleman made it possible for Edmond Szekely to obtain Mexican citizenship in 1949. With this accomplished, there was no problem regarding the ownership of the various parcels of land. The Szekelys also acquired property across the border in Tecate, California, for storage, printing and mailing facilities. Many guests praised the wellness agenda at Rancho La Puerta and, during the next two decades, the ranch became modernized and continued its program of health and fitness.
Life at the Ranch

By the early 1950s, Rancho La Puerta had achieved considerable renown as a health spa—a name taken from the town of Spa in the province of Liege, Belgium, famous for its mineral springs used for both bathing and drinking. The Szekelys’ philosophy of healthful living included both water and sun among its basic ingredients. The professor, who once described himself as “an amphibian,” had his guests bathing in the Tecate River until a beautiful stone masonry swimming pool was added to the grounds. Decorated with Toltec mythological figures, the pool had walls two feet thick and a natural rock border. Other amenities, including an electrical plant, transformed the rustic rancho into a comfortable resort.

Below the original barn, which was converted into the professor’s office, the laborers built the vineyard dining room with a central fireplace and adjoining kitchen. They enclosed the well in a picturesque brick pavilion that later became a small office. A new “hygiene building with hot and cold showers, flush toilets and colonic machine” was built near the swimming pool. A lecture hall adjoining the library provided a place where guests could “learn the principles of health and right thinking.” Among these were the benefits of sun and water bathing. According to the Essene Quarterly of 1953:

> The circulation can be intensified and the ejection of waste products from the body stimulated by two other therapies: heliotherapy and hydrotherapy; or better, by a combination of the two. Great benefits are obtainable by bathing, swimming or doing water exercises outdoors or by taking a simultaneous water, air and sunbath. The latter application consists in lying in shallow water first with the back in the water and the front of the body exposed to the air and sun, and then vice versa. If this is practiced a few times regularly every day, the circulation will be greatly intensified, as will breathing by the skin. Moreover, the absorption of the sun’s rays has a bactericidal action. The total effect is to intensify the elimination of waste matter from the organism, an important aim in the grape cure.

Because the ranch improvements were all completed by local Mexican labor, the Szekelys established an excellent working relationship with the people of Tecate. Among these early employees were members of Cipriano Federico’s family. His sons (and later grandsons) served in many capacities of responsibility. Also among the families working at the ranch were Aureliano Silva, his wife Lucy, and their extended family.
In keeping with his archeological studies in Central Mexico, the professor trained the artisans to make concrete models of the most significant cosmological symbols, reproducing the original colors of Aztec gods in sizes of about 2 feet x 2 feet. These were placed all over the ranch so that students and guests could “absorb through spiritual osmosis the beauty and meaning of those pictographs without any conscious study or effort.”

The study of these artifacts, plus a collection of several thousand volumes on Mexico’s history, literature, art, and philosophy, eventually developed into the establishment of a Society of Comparative Studies of Ancient Cultures. Don Eufrazio Santana, Mayor of Tecate, Don Antonio Girbau, and Don Fernando Cecena all helped the Szekelys legalize their multiple and rather unusual activities.

As a vivid recreation of ancient Mexico, the professor taught his students how to play a Toltec ball game constructed in exact archeological detail. The game, which he described as “a fiendishly clever and physically demanding one, utilizing the movements of soccer, basketball and hockey...was also highly symbolic and full of hidden meaning.” Each movement and action played a role in the eternal cosmic battle between Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent—a benevolent God-creator and symbol of good—and Huitzilopochtli, the jaguar—a warlike bloodthirsty symbol of evil. Some of the other symbols were mazatl, the deer, representing peace; malinalli, grass, life; and xochitl, the flower, joy. Twenty wooden idols were placed in the form of a large X representing the symbol of giffin, the sun, or creation, perhaps the most important of ancient Mexico. In the center of the X was the symbol of man, called Tia, who dwelled in the house of the gods.

According to Professor Szekely, the idea of the game was to traverse all the idols, journeying from a symbol of good to a symbol of evil, struggling with each in turn, starting at the outermost rim of the large X and working toward the center—that as powers of good and evil are utilized and mastered, the good forces enriching our lives, the evil ones teaching us valuable lessons, life’s pilgrimage becomes less and less difficult, until finally we reach the center of the journey—the Teocalli in the middle of the field of wooden idols—where there is no good and no evil, only oneness in the Eternal Present.

These idols and their significance were described in full in Edmond
Szekely’s book *La Filosofia del Mexico Antigua* published in Tecate in 1954. Discussion of the game spread among the Mexican workers until the Catholic priest in Tecate began to preach against the pagan cult services at Rancho La Puerta. After a visit to the ranch, the professor, who could recite portions of the Catholic liturgy in Latin, convinced the priest that the “idols” were a mere learning device. The priest then acknowledged the Szekelys as good friends of Mexico and told his Mexican followers that they could work with pride at the ranch.

The modern lecture hall had staging facilities and was decorated with the pictographic symbols of the Mayan, Toltec and Aztec cultures of Mexico. Guests gathered there each evening to enjoy the lectures, question and answer periods, scenic and educational films, or performances of the Little Theater Group of La Puerta. In the department of Arts and Crafts guests learned techniques of blending colors on silver and copper pins, and the art of tooling ancient Mexican and primitive designs on leather, or enjoyed other artistic endeavors. A playroom was built for guests to use for reading, bridge, or backgammon.

The food at Rancho La Puerta consisted generally of organically grown tender greens and natural, sweet wheat sprouts, soy-butter, wheat germ butter, Swiss muesli, fruit salad, homemade wheat germ tortillas and rolls, homemade acidophilus (yoghurt like) milk drinks, herb teas, and grape juices taken every hour between meals. The professor developed a multi-food supplement called “Nutr-all” after years of nutritional and biochemical research. It consisted of twenty-three ingredients representing the natural mineral, vitamin, amino acid and other nutritional values most widely recommended by health professionals. Its components were skim milk and wheat germ powder, rice polish, and powders of malt, soy, carob, cottonseed, sunflower seed, lactose, dextrose, flaxseed, brewer’s yeast, whey, deep-sea kelp, sea lettuce, watercress, mint, lemon, celery seed, dandelion, alfalfa, parsley and mustard greens. Another nutritional supplement was called “Formula 89” and contained 22 pure, organically grown foods in the form of a dehydrated powdered vegetable mix.

The Health Gymnasium and Outdoor Physiotherapy Department became one of the most popular spots. Situated between the swimming pool and one of the vineyards surrounding the school, it was devoted to the achievement and improvement of circulation, posture, oxygen transport (lung and skin breathing),
internal massage, basic metabolism, relaxation, complexion, and vitamin D absorption. It included terraces with equipment for simultaneous sun-air-water baths with aromatic herbs, skin massages with aromatic oil, slanting boards, and a large glass solarium.

By 1953 there were 125 guests’ rooms varying from an adobe house with private bath and patio to 36 little cabins in the vineyards. By 1956 a juice-bar lounge near the swimming pool and library had been provided for guests, then numbering 175, to enjoy several kinds of refreshing drinks at anytime during the day as a supplement to those served at meals. Daily exercises were taught in the outdoor health gymnasium classes, and walking in the fresh air several times a day was encouraged. The scientific reducing method developed by the professor was extremely effective. It was as follows:

### Morning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>1 cup La Puerta Mineral Spring Water at Old Indian Spring Pavilion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>1 cup grape leaf tea in Soft Diet dining room</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:00</td>
<td>1 cup raw organic grape cider with individual formula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>another cup of the same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Noon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00</td>
<td>Organic raw vegetable salad with one cup acidophilus cultured milk in Vineyard dining room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Afternoon

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3:00</td>
<td>1 cup organic green chlorophyll cocktail in juice-bar lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00</td>
<td>1 cup sea-vegetable cocktail in juice-bar lounge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>organic raw vegetable dish with one slice high protein organic whole grain bread in Vineyard dining room</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Evening

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30</td>
<td>50 germinated seeds with one “12 green vegetables” tablet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:30</td>
<td>50 soy-nuts with one “12 green vegetables” tablet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The grounds were improved with landscaping under the direction of Erna Earle. Deborah continued to manage all of the business aspects of the ranch and was particularly skillful in supervising the Mexican workers. Weekly fees at
The ranch averaged $35.00 and children were always welcome. Among the many important helpers of those early years were Elizabeth (Betty) McLean and her mother Edith (Adelita) Lydall. They had been in the professor’s seminar in Slimy, England, before the war and lived in Scotland. When they learned about Rancho La Puerta they came immediately. Betty, whose husband Colin was in a Japanese prison camp, became an all-around secretary and helper of wounded or needy animals. She rescued an undernourished donkey that became a regular ranch resident and she saw to it that all of the pets had their rabies vaccinations. Her mother was devoted to the wellness program and assisted with the guests.

By the end of the 1950s, Rancho La Puerta had become a popular and successful year-round health resort and school of “Scientific Living.” Its reputation had spread throughout the United States and even overseas. Exotic guests ranged from movie producer Gabriel Pascal to the well-known philosopher Aldous Huxley. Huxley found Rancho La Puerta a peaceful haven where he could relax and be himself. Because of Huxley’s interest in the professor’s work, and his own investigations into techniques of expanding the human consciousness, he and his wife Laura joined the Szekelys in planning a symposium. The subject was The Human Potential and was held at the ranch from June 27 through July 1, 1960, as a special twentieth anniversary celebration.

The Szekely’s first child, daughter Sarah Livia, was born April 4, 1956. She spoke Spanish before English and was lovingly cared for by the Mexican families working at the ranch. She faced quite an adjustment on her first day at Francis Parker School in San Diego when she found out that no one, including the teacher, spoke Spanish. When her brother Alexandre was born less than two years later
on February 19, 1958, the Szekelys knew they were doubly blessed. He too fell under the watchful eyes of the Mexican employees. Livia, a precocious child, was nicknamed Little Owl, and Alexandre, playful and fun loving, was called Little Bear after his father. The professor had been known since his soccer playing days as El Oso (the Bear) because his movements were just like a big bear. When Alex was old enough to attend Francis Parker School, he was good company for his sister on the trips to and from San Diego since both children returned each weekend to the ranch. Livia wrote her first collection of poems, which she called *First Flowers*, at the age of ten. Alex preferred athletics, excelling in skiing and sailing. Both were enthusiastic, energetic, well-adjusted, intelligent children who grew up in an incredible atmosphere of love, affection, and intellectual stimulation. And, if that were not enough, they had an entire rancho as a playground.
Opening the Golden Door

With Rancho La Puerta on a firm footing, Deborah decided to pursue some new ideas. She had long searched for a place where they could practice the full range of their concepts on a small scale. Deborah recalled that they wanted a resort planned from the start to be small, intimate, and “her” version of heaven. They looked all over southern California and found a small motel for sale in the area of Escondido. The cluster of buildings and surrounding wooded area, appropriate for the construction of the Toltec ball game, were perfect for the Szekelys’ plans. They purchased the property in 1958, added ten more rooms, and re-created in each the spirit and style of a separate culture and age in history. They used floral oils belonging to each period, for example ancient Rome, Victorian England, or Provincial France. Those living in each room could absorb the environment and even the fragrance of that long past century.

The professor described the beginnings of the Golden Door. La Puerta, which means door as well as gate in English, provided the noun and golden characterized the special nature of the spa:

Little by little my miniature spa began to exhibit a fascinating array of customs of ancient civilizations, some of which were practiced for health, others for beauty, and still others because of their function in the world picture and philosophical attitudes of the particular age. For example, I reconstructed several Sumerian baths from ancient pictographs...in the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates. When Sir John Marshall first discovered these baths, he thought they were tombs, because the outlines clearly indicated that a human body should lie there. However, they were only four inches deep, far too shallow for a tomb, and gradually it was realized that those sarcophagus-like indentations were for the purpose of bathing.

This ancient practice, the professor pointed out, was ingenious, practical and esthetic. Since the Sumerians lived in a very dry climate where water was extremely scarce, they were able to achieve their purpose using only a few inches of water:

They reclined in the baths with half of the body in the cold water, the other half exposed to the sun. From time to time they turned over, so that the part of the body which had been exposed to the sun now (most gratefully) went to the cold water, and in a few minutes the process was reversed again. This continuous changing from cold
Rancho La Puerta

water to hot sun not only alleviated the discomfort of the sun’s heat, but also contributed to a very even, beautiful sun tan.28

Another innovation at the Golden Door (and a popular practice at Rancho La Puerta) was the herbal wrap of ancient Egypt. A person’s body was wrapped in fragrant linens first soaked in steaming water to which various herbs had been added. Those taking the herbal wrap found themselves wrapped gently in tepid linens while their bodies became permeated with the delicious fragrance of fresh herbs.

Certain of the Golden Door exercises were adopted from Leonardo da Vinci’s early sixteenth century system for keeping Italian troops in good condition during the cold winters. In those days the men kept fit so they would be ready for Spring maneuvers or wars to the north. Da Vinci’s exercises are said to constitute the basis of the ballet and were a series of movements based on the Point, the Line and the Circle that drew in space certain geometrical figures. The Point symbolizes stars; the Line, when vertical, represents trees, and when horizontal, water; the Circle stands for the movement of the earth on its axis. These exercises, based on da Vinci’s philosophy of the innate geometric perfection of the human body, provided a constant source of inspiration and challenge to the men and women at the Golden Door who had never before thought of themselves as potentially perfect or the ideal receptacle of the greatest of all miracles—the human spirit.

Because of Professor Szekely’s dedication to water in all forms, a concept that was a major part of the daily routine at Rancho La Puerta, the swimming pool was
one of his first concerns at the Golden Door. As the professor wrote in regard to
the ranch: “I wanted very much to reconstruct some of the ancient uses of water
not only as a therapy, but as a way to expand the consciousness and create for
ourselves an atmosphere of familiarity and love of water—a source of infinite
energy to the ancient Essenes, who called it the angel of Water, and considered it
as the physical reflection of the Angel of love…I also reconstructed the Balinese
Water Dance, performed in the rivers of Bali by the temple dancers to achieve
suppleness—movements older than their recorded history.”

Everything went very well at the Golden Door after the first year and there
was almost always a waiting list. Deborah kept the spa running smoothly and the
professor traveled from Rancho La Puerta to give lectures once a week. Because of
the individual attention given to guests (a 1 to 3 ratio), the nutritional requirements,
the extensive exercise program, and the number of activities, administration of
the spa was demanding. In their search for the optimal director, the Szekelys were
fortunate to find Dr. Anne Marie Bennstrom, a young woman who had received
her physical culture training at the University of Lund in her native Sweden.
She had been operating a successful health and exercise center nearby and was
admirably suited to take on the Golden Door. She favored the simple, natural way
of life and had once spent months hiking alone in the mountains of Central America and Mexico. Her philosophy appealed to those among the guests who, despite their wealth and achievements, still searched for something to give greater depth and substance to their minds and spiritual lives.

In keeping with his philosophy of nature, the professor produced his own oils and lotions to protect and pamper the skin of the guests. Many additional cosmetics resulted in “a biochemical overhaul of the traditional commercial products.” Using natural botanical sources, the professor’s foundations and lotions were immediately popular. Deborah saw to the practical aspects of packaging these cosmetics and the reputable “Golden Door” line of products was born. Many that were developed at Rancho La Puerta were widely used at both resorts.

One of the problems of the Golden Door arose from its success. Originally designed as a mini-spa, accommodating just 12 guests per week, it received so much attention from the media that there was an immediate demand. As articles appeared in *Time, Life, Newsweek, Vogue,* and *Sports Illustrated,* the unique spa attracted more and more of the rich and famous. In 1969 an article appeared in *Newsweek* describing Rancho La Puerta as the largest health spa in North America and the world-famous Golden Door as the most luxurious beauty resort in existence. It described the professor as owning more than a dozen ranches in California and Baja California, a publishing business, a successful line of cosmetics, and in general as an enviable entrepreneur. For Edmond Bordeaux Szekely, promoter of the simple life of the Essene, it was too much responsibility. He decided to leave the area and search once again for the simple path to truth through archeological and spiritual work. The Szekelys were divorced in 1969.

**Into The Modern World — 1970 to 1985**

Rancho La Puerta underwent numerous changes from its early days as the Essene School of Life. Eventually guests no longer contributed a portion of their
time to gardening, food preparation, or other tasks. Conversely, the exercise program became more structured and diversified. During its evolution, the Tecate health spa achieved spectacular success both as a pioneer in the fitness revolution and as a business enterprise. Even through its emphasis had always been upon a well-rounded program of balanced nutrition, exercise, and reduction of stress, the ranch became well known for its weight-loss program—a natural byproduct of fitness and improved diet. Articles appeared regularly in local, regional, and national publications extolling the benefits of a stay at Rancho La Puerta.

In 1970 Deborah Szekely made a key decision. Instead of further expanding the ranch accommodations, she decided to limit the number of guests and continue to improve the facilities. Small cabins were removed to make way for more luxurious Mexican style haciendas, cabanas and casitas. The sprawling 100 acres of the ranch allowed widely separated clusters of individual houses to continue. Plans for a new two-bedroom villa complex complete with a large swimming pool, jacuzzi, sauna, and additional tennis courts, were sketched with care. During the late 1970s, Rancho La Puerta pointed with pride to a staff of 200 to meet the needs of 100 guests.

Among the Mexican families working at the ranch, one in particular was representative of the kind of relationship that the Szekelys developed with the
people of Tecate. In February 1961, José Rodolfo Jasso, his wife Cecilia, and their young son José Manuel, originally from the state of Jalisco, began working at the ranch. Rodolfo worked on the grounds and buildings while Cecilia helped in the kitchen, and was eventually given charge of the herbal wraps. Some 25 years later, Cecilia was still at the ranch, skillfully wrapping guests in her herb-drenched hot linens and sending them into a relaxed 45-minute period of comfort. José Manuel became familiar with all of the ranch’s operations and served as general manager for many years. He and Deborah collaborated on every aspect of the ranch’s administration and development.

A Day at Rancho La Puerta

Despite its upgraded conveniences, Rancho La Puerta has maintained the same fundamental philosophy espoused by Deborah’s family in pre-Depression New York and by Professor Szekely as a result of his European background and training. The regimen of the early days, in keeping with the Essene belief in fresh air, sunshine, and simplicity, has provided the basis for the overall structure of the daily program. An essentially vegetarian diet is maintained with the exception of small servings of fish two or three times a week. The Toltec ball game has been replaced by basketball and volleyball, but the original carved figures of the ancient Mexican idols still decorate the grounds. Guests arriving at the ranch for 

the first time are given a guided tour of the facilities and, on the first evening, hear a short presentation from each of the fitness experts on the staff. For many, the most essential offering at the ranch is exercise, beginning at 6:30 a.m. with a brisk mountain hike on a high trail overlooking the ranch. This challenging feat rewards the hardy with pure bracing air, a view of the peaceful valley and farmlands below, and a healthy appreciation for the nutritious breakfast awaiting the hiker’s return.

A popular alternative to this rather strenuous climb is the morning walk at 7:00 a.m. that takes its participants on a wide circle across the rolling hills of the ranch or to the organic garden. Still others can join the advanced parcours at 7:45 a.m. or the wake-up exercises at 8:00. Breakfast, buffet style, consists of fresh fruit, boiled eggs, natural whole-grain cereals, ranch bread (baked in huge ovens daily), hot tea or coffee.

During the morning, guests can choose from several offerings each hour that, if appropriate, are noted as either vigorous, especially for men, or given on certain days only. These include body awareness, resistance weight conditioning, circuit training, jazzex, Golden Door exercises (a strenuous workout originally introduced at the ranch’s sister spa in Escondido), and a pool class. The professor’s long association with the “angel of water” has been perfected in a series of water-resistant exercises that have since been offered at almost all fitness resorts. Another sport, water volleyball, has also achieved considerable popularity. A variety of activities ranging from jump rope to lectures on stress reduction are offered at 12:00 noon. Lunch is served from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. and includes green salads, plates of fresh fruit, or a “blitz plate” of cottage cheese, fresh lettuce and tomatoes.

Afternoon activities begin at 2:00 p.m. with choices of a pool class, stretch and relax, body contouring, beginner’s parcours, yoga, and a running clinic. Some guests participate in classes while others play tennis, jog, or just relax by the pool. At the 5:30 p.m. “cocktail hour” guests indulge in fresh vegetables, fruit juice, and herb tea. The ranch features a variety of coffees and a chance to sample the local wines and craft beers. The conversation is spirited and there is a feeling of comradeship among people who generally share a belief in physical fitness, and held a new outlook on nutrition and ideas about health that have come down through the ages. Dinner, served at large family-sized tables between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m. gives guests the opportunity to continue conversations begun during the day and to meet other people from across the country. The food is basically vegetarian and features salt-free, sugar-free low-calorie recipes perfected over the years at the ranch or at the Golden Door. Evening activities consist of lectures on history, travel, health, and related topics. In addition there are concerts and movies in the Oak Tree Pavilion, classes in arts and crafts, folk dancing, bingo,
card playing, or reading in the well-stocked library. Few people have difficulty sleeping in the quiet, relaxing atmosphere of Rancho La Puerta.

Those who wish to be pampered at times throughout their stay can take advantage of the full offerings of the beauty salon, moved to a new, expansive building in 1982, or the therapeutic services offered to ease the discomfort of aching muscles. A Swedish massage or facial, expertly given by local Mexican employees, is available in either the women’s or men’s therapy centers. Many of the Tecate families have been performing these services for ten, fifteen, or even twenty years. Most often spouses, children, and grandchildren work in other areas of the ranch.

The Professor Moves on from Rancho La Puerta

By 1971, Professor Szekely had left the ranch permanently to open a lakeside retreat near Guadalajara and bring back the Essene movement. The professor’s new surroundings brought him closer to his early research and once again he reconstructed the Toltec ball game. Through correspondence, he kept in touch with many of his followers who had listened to his morning and evening talks in the rancho lecture room by the library. His lectures had been an inspiration to so many that he agreed to return to San Diego in 1975 for a summer Essene seminar and workshop. He and his followers met at the Swedenborgian church. The gathering was so successful that another seminar was held in 1976. Following this, the professor traveled to British Columbia, where he studied the northwest Indian cultures and renewed acquaintances with former guests who had stayed at Rancho La Puerta. He then spent time in Costa Rica for research into the ancient Toltec ball game and to survey the various fruits and vegetables grown in that region of Central America.

In 1971, the Professor had left his share of the Golden Door and properties in San Diego to his ex-wife Deborah, his ranches in Baja California to his children Sarah Livia and Alexandre, then 15 and 13, and set up new headquarters on Lake Chapala, near Guadalajara, Mexico. He had his many books shipped to this tranquil setting in order to carry out his plans to write and publish the books he had put off during the thirty years of success at Rancho La Puerta and the
Golden Door. In 1979 Edmond Szekely became ill and died in his sleep. During his lifetime he had published more than twenty books, especially those concerning the Essene Gospel of Peace.

During the early 1970s, Deborah continued to direct activities at both the Golden Door and Rancho La Puerta, care for her two high-school children, and donate her time to a number of worthy causes in the San Diego area. She married a long-time friend, psychiatrist Dr. Vincent Mazzanti in June 1972, and was becoming nationally recognized for her work in nutrition and fitness. She joined the Board of the Menninger Foundation and President Gerald Ford appointed her to the White House Council on Physical Fitness in 1975. Despite a full schedule, Deborah found time to share her many experiences with “spa living” in a long-awaited book entitled *Secrets of the Golden Door* published in 1976. It includes not only recommendations for a balanced diet and exercise, but contains her own suggestions for developing an inner peace not unlike that of the early Essenes.

Deborah’s long working hours at both health resorts, and her commitment to civic projects, left little time for a settled, married life. Her marriage to Dr. Mazzanti ended in divorce in 1978.

**Deborah and Alex Take the Lead**

Deborah returned to her former married name of Szekely, and continued behind the scenes at Rancho La Puerta and the Golden Door. She turned over
the managerial duties of both spas to her son Alexandre in 1982. Alex, long recognized as a visionary leader in the spa industry, was a founder and president of the International Spa Association. He, along with Deborah, championed a mind/body/spirit connection to health that transcended the traditional concept of pampering. Alex made a number of improvements at both the Golden Door and Rancho La Puerta during the decade of the 1980s. A new reception area with modern offices was constructed at the Ranch to welcome the newly arrived guests, while several additional villa-type living quarters were built on the hill to the east. A large, modernized dining hall with conference and meeting rooms made it possible for the ranch to meet the increased needs of its clientele. The Vineyard dining room with its center fireplace and unique decorative tiles became “El Mercado”—a marketplace featuring products from throughout Mexico. The maximum number of guests increased to 150—still small enough to continue the individual attention that had become the cornerstone of the ranch’s success. Because of the increase in the number of men participating in structured fitness programs, a new men’s therapy center, much larger than the former small building with its two massage tables, was built. Sadly, Alex was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma in 1998. He and Deborah made the decision to sell the Golden Door to give Alex more free time. He continued to direct Rancho La Puerta and to make improvements until he died prematurely in 2002, a tragic loss mourned by Alex’s extended family on both sides of the border.30

Rancho La Puerta, currently managed by Roberto Arjona and Deborah’s daughter Sarah Livia, has remained Deborah’s personal favorite—her own place of renewal among family and friends. She continues to oversee major upgrades at the ranch that have kept up with changing times. For many decades there was little technology inside the ranch, so guests unable to do without media access felt they could not stay there for any length of time. According to General Manager Arjona, there was a tier of the market who would come to the ranch if they had access to high-speed internet.
Trusting the resort’s motto of “siempre mejor” or “always better,” they created three villas that form a private enclave on the eastern edge of the 3,000 acre ranch. Called Villas Cielo, or Heavenly Villas, the suites, which average around 2,000 square feet, contain enclosed patios, pools, and other characteristic amenities of the ranch, plus the Wi-Fi facility. Despite their commitment to an experience far removed from the cares of everyday life, Deborah and her team believe that the villas serve both as a private sanctuary as well as a lifeline to the outside world. They feel that internet for guests does not contradict the ranch’s wellness connection.

As the years have passed, Deborah has accepted each new direction of her life and continued her enthusiastic and rewarding journey in the entrepreneurial world. Unlike her former husband Edmond, she has not been frustrated by the many demands placed upon her. As she stated in 1986 in an interview for the Los Angeles Times: “I’m a typical entrepreneur personality…I have high energy and long working hours. I’m creative, dedicated and perseverant.” The next thirty years would prove Deborah’s perseverance, management skills, and adherence to her program of self-improvement through healthful living. She became active in U.S. government service as early as 1970 and worked as President and CEO of the Inter-American Foundation, an independent agency of the United States government to support grass-roots development throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. She also founded the post World War II New Americans Museum in 2001, later moved to Liberty Station, and is involved in its programs. Among her many awards, Deborah was named the “Godmother of Wellness,” by the Huffington Post and was inducted into the San Diego County Women’s Hall of Fame. She is the author of Cooking With the Seasons at Rancho La Puerta and several other books. Rancho La Puerta was given an award as the Conde Nast Traveller (UK) 2017 Best Fitness Regime in 2017.

As of early 2017, Deborah Szekely remains active in the management of Rancho La Puerta and her many philanthropic programs. She serves on several boards and funds numerous projects relating to education, health and welfare, and the environment, especially those that affect lives the San Diego-Baja California region. She has had an exceptional career and leads a truly amazing life.
NOTES

1. This article is based upon a number of personal interviews with Deborah Szekely beginning during the 1990s when I was a frequent lecturer at Rancho La Puerta covering its general history. Recent interviews were with Deborah during October and November 2016.


3. According to Deborah, her parents announced they were leaving in 16 days for Tahiti. She did not know where that was.

4. Personal interview with Deborah Szekely.

5. Ibid.


7. Deborah worked as Edmond’s secretary for a year. They had plans to return to England but the professor’s passport was canceled so they took the train back to San Francisco. Edmond proposed on the train and she accepted.

8. Edmond Szekely was officially a member of the Rumanian Reserves who were ordered to join Hitler’s reserves. Since Edmond refused to return to Europe, he was classified as a deserter and remained so throughout World War II.

9. The Great Experiment, p. 14

11. Dead Sea location.
12. *The Zend Avesta of Zarathustra.*
15. The Jesuit order, which founded 17 missions two-thirds of the way up the Baja California peninsula, were expelled by the Spanish government in 1768. The Franciscans took over the missions until 1772 when the Dominicans replaced them in Baja California south of San Diego.
16. In 1829, the Mexican governor of Alta California José María de Echeandía granted the valley of Tecate as the 4,439 acres (1,796 hectares) Rancho Tecate to Juan Bandini. In 1836 the mountain dwelling Kumeyaay with aid from former mission neophytes, raided and plundered the rancho. They besieged the ranch house but the men within managed to hold out until it was relieved by a force from San Diego. With his stock and horses stolen and the house burned, Bandini—like owners of other ranchos near San Diego—had to abandon the isolated rancho. Due to the continuing hostilites with the Kumeyaay, Bandini never returned and was compensated with Rancho Jurupa in 1838.
17. Interview with Deborah Szekely.
18. Ibid.
20. Interview with Deborah Szekely; brochure Rancho La Puerta.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
24. Interview with Deborah Szekely.
25. Ibid.
26. It was owned by nutrionist Martin Pretorious, head of a life-reform movement with a strong emphasis on health.
27. Interview with Deborah Szekely.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
32. Interview with Deborah Szekely.
A Plea for Justice:
Cupeño Indians versus Homesteaders in 1880s San Diego County
By Phil Brigandi

In 1883 Helen Hunt Jackson toured the Indian villages and reservations of Southern California as an official agent of the United States Government, charged with reporting on their “condition and needs.” Time and again she found the Indians—both on and off the reservations—struggling with tenuous land titles, uncertain boundaries, and unscrupulous settlers. Many villages had already been driven out—sometimes by force, sometimes by force of law.

At Warner Hot Springs Jackson visited the village of Cupa, or Agua Caliente as it was also known at the time. The Cupeño people there were already threatened with removal by the owner of the Warner Ranch, former California Governor John G. Downey.1 They still retained their small fields below the village, but were left with no good grazing land for their livestock. Jackson reported:

These Indians have in use another valley called Lost Valley, some fifteen miles from their village high up in the mountains, and reached by one very steep trail. Here they keep their stock, being no longer able to pasture it below. They were touchingly anxious to have us write down the numbers of cattle, horses, [and] sheep each man had and report to Washington that the President might see how they were all trying to work. There are probably from one hundred and twenty-five

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Phil Brigandi has been researching and writing local history since 1975. Born and raised in Orange County, he has long had an interest in the Riverside/San Diego County backcountry. Brigandi is the co-author with Valerie Mathes of “Charles C. Painter, Helen Hunt Jackson and the Mission Indians of Southern California,” The Journal of San Diego History, Vol. 55, No. 3, Summer 2009.
to one hundred and fifty head of cattle owned in the village, about fifty horses, and one hundred sheep.2

Lost Valley is aptly named. Located at 4,500 feet in the San Ysidro Mountains, north of Hot Springs Mountain, its grassy meadows are surrounded by oak and pine, watered by several springs and the upper reaches of Agua Caliente Creek. The Cupeño had hunted and gathered acorns there for centuries, and a trade trail along the eastern edge of the valley connected the villages around Hot Springs Mountain with the Santa Rosa Mountains and the Coachella Valley beyond.

American cattlemen had discovered the valley by the 1870s. About the same time as Jackson’s visit, Willis and William Newton (father and son) each filed 160-acre pre-emption claims that seem to have covered most of the meadow lands in the valley. This would have allowed them to eventually purchase the land from the government at a low price. But their claims never got that far. In July 1883, Mission Indian Agent Samuel S. Lawson wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs asking that their entries be canceled. He was obviously unsure of just where the Newtons’ claims were located, but felt they clearly covered lands used by the Indians. Lawson seems to have thought the area was part of what is now the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation:
The land referred to in T[ownship]p 9S R4E S[an] B[ernardino] meridian, and filed on by the Newtons should be withdrawn as it has long been occupied by the Indians of that village…. Definite lines of subdivision cannot be given without a survey of the land. It will be safe to hold this filing for cancellation as it will embrace all that the Indians have occupied. These people have lived there long and done well. They cultivate and pasture the land referred to and should not be molested.3

Based on Agent Lawson’s quick intervention, the Newtons’ entries were cancelled. But the Indians’ reprieve was short-lived, as the interesting series of letters reproduced here will show. Two letters from longtime Cupeño captain José María Moro and two letters from Lawson’s successor as Mission Indian Agent, John G. McCallum, were included with a letter from Los Angeles attorney G. Wiley Wells seeking advice from Washington on Indian land rights. These letters illustrate not only the Cupeño’s use of Lost Valley, but also their efforts to protect it, both on the ground and by turning to the American legal system.
Honorable L. Q. C. Lamar;  
Secretary of the Interior;  
Washington D.C.

Sir;

As special Assistant to the United States Attorney, in all cases affecting the interests of the Mission Indians in California, under appointment by the Attorney General dated June 26th 1883, I have been attending to matters embraced within the letter of appointment addressed to the firm of Brunson & Wells. Hon. A. Brunson, my former partner, having been elected Judge of the Superior Court of the County; and being thereby disqualified for the practice of his profession, the firm of Brunson & Wells was dissolved and I have continued to act under the letter of appointment above referred to.  

Yesterday I was called upon by a delegation of Mission Indians residing in San Diego County, accompanied by Father Williams, a Catholic Missionary who acted as interpreter for them. They represented to me that the lands which they occupied, and which have been withdrawn by executive order from settlement, are being continually trespassed upon by whites who are attempting to claim the same under the laws of the United States.

They further represent that the encroachments of these white men have exasperated many of their tribe; and that they are now in a state of excitement such as would be dangerous to trifle with; and that unless something is done to protect them in their homes, there is liable to be serious trouble between them and the white men. They are occupying lands which were reserved from settlement by the following executive orders, to wit:

- Executive order dated June 19, 1885.
- Executive order dated June 27th, 1882.
- Executive order dated March 2d, 1881.
- Executive order dated Sept. 29th, 1883.
Executive order dated—1877.
Executive order dated May 15, 1876.
Executive order dated May 15, 1876.
Executive order dated Dec. 27, 1875.5

The great difficulty seems to be that the Indians do not know the boundaries of these tracts of public land upon which they are located, and which are withdrawn from settlement; and they therefore cannot take the proper legal steps to protect themselves from the encroachments of trespassing parties. It seems to us that it would be proper to have a deputy U.S. Surveyor authorized to go out upon the land accompanied by the Chief of the tribe, and point out the boundaries of the lands upon which they reside. The Indians would then know the lines, and would be able to report the fact whether or not trespasses were being made upon the lands which they occupied, and the proper legal steps could then be taken to protect them in their rights.

I would suggest therefore that the Department authorize the Surveyor General to have these lines established in such a way that the Indians may have actual knowledge of their boundaries. From the representations made to me by the delegation who called, I am satisfied that unless something is done speedily there is liable to be trouble between them and the settlers who are trespassing upon the lands referred to. These Indians are continually reporting these troubles to me in my official capacity, and I am desirous of doing everything that I can to protect them in their rights.

I also have the honor to report the receipt of two letters from the Indian Agent at San Bernardino, addressed to the firm of Wells, Van Dyke & Lee, of which I am the senior member, which letters are dated May 14th 1885, and May 18th 1885 respectively, with enclosures with reference to Indian matters.

I am not sure whether my letter of appointment gives me authority to act in the matters referred to in the two communications of the Indian Agent. If however the letter of appointment is to be so understood I will take the proper steps to protect the Indians in the cases referred to; and in such other cases of a similar character as may be referred to me. I enclose herewith copies of the letters and enclosures referred to. Awaiting your further direction in the matter, I have the honor to be
Very respectfully,

G. Wiley Wells  
Special Assistant United States Attorney  
In Mission Indian cases.  
7 Enc.  
(Copy)

Wells also included three additional letters forwarded by Agent McCallum dealing with another land conflict on Volcan Mountain between Warner’s Ranch and Santa Ysabel, which have been omitted here. In brief, that dispute was over a homestead on the mountain filed before the Santa Ysabel Indian Reservation was established and later acquired by one Castinos Paine and occupied by his son-in-law, Charles Moretti. This dispute dragged on for nearly 20 years until the government bought the land, “thus settling a matter of long standing and much annoyance.”

The letters reproduced below are extremely significant and represent a rare first-hand account of the position of the Cúpeño Indians. José María Moro (ca 1815-1885) was a member of the Cibimoat clan, but used the family name Moro. As early as 1851 he was said to be in control of the village of Cupa when Captain Antonio Garra was away. Whether he took part in the Garra Uprising of 1851 is not recorded, but if he did, he must not have played a very major role since he was never tried for any offense. Sometime after Garra’s execution, Moro became the captain (chief) of the Cúpeño. The 1860 census lists him as captain, aged about 40. In 1873 a government agent met with Moro. “From a notched stick given me by the captain of the village, Jose Maria Moro, it appears that there are one hundred and sixty-eight Indians at that place...” he reported. “They are peaceably disposed, and for the most industrious, and deserve better treatment than they get.” Moro was still in command when Helen Hunt Jackson visited the village a decade later and wrote:

The aged captain of the Agua Caliente Indians still preserves a paper giving a memorandum of the setting off of this reservation of about 1,120 acres for his people. It was by executive order, 1875. He also treasures several other equally worthless papers—a certificate from a San Diego judge that the Indians are entitled to their lands; a memorandum of a promise from General Kearney [sic], who assured them that in consideration of their friendliness and assistance to him
they should retain their homes without molestation, ‘although the whole State should fill with white men.’ It is not to be wondered at that these Agua Caliente Indians find it difficult to-day to put any faith in white men’s promises.... [This] is said to be the most industrious village in the county; the old captain dealing severely with any Indians found idle.⁹

Moro’s widow, Machola Moro, testified in 1893 in the eviction suit brought against the Cupeño by Gov. Downey when she was about 75 years of age. In part she said:

My husband was José Maria Moro; he was the captain of the Agua Caliente village, had control over the people that lived there and advised them to keep quiet and work – [he] was Captain a long time.... My husband had an orchard above the springs; it was planted by his father.... My husband used to go and work in the upper country ... [he] didn’t work for anybody; he was a kind of shoemaker. He used to hunt a good deal, and kill deer and make buckskin.... (Harvey vs Barker, Transcript on Appeal, [n.p.: Chas. W. Palm Co., 1897], 68-71).

But the court held that the Cupeño had no rights to their land, and after appeals to both the California and United States Supreme Courts, the people were taken from their homes by the U.S. Government in 1903, and forced on to the reservation at Pala. Machola Moro died there around 1910, well past 90 years of age.
The inclosed letter dated the 5th inst. from Jose Ma Moro presents certain legal questions, which are respectfully submitted for your opinion as Govt. counsel for the Mission Indians. There are a number of similar cases. The leading facts are these: A Mission Indian is settled upon public lands, outside of any reserve, when he makes some improvements. A white man dispossesses the Indian (usually by taking possession during the Indian’s temporary absence) and refuses to leave. I have no authority outside of the reserves to remove the trespasser. It is a case for the Courts. A regulation was made by the General Land Office, within the last few years, requiring a settler to prove by competent [sic] testimony that no Indian was living upon, or had improvements upon the land sought to be entered by the Settler without which proof no entry could be made.10

Besides, a law was enacted last July by Congress, providing that Indians could have homesteads on the public lands on the same terms and conditions as white persons.11 I have not the notice spoken of as being “inclosed” in Capt. Moro’s letter; but can state that it was simply a notice that Wm. Panie [sic] claimed the land in question....If your employment extends to such cases please take such action as you deem best....

All the land referred to in [this letter is] outside of the reserves. Shall I refer such cases to you in the future?

Very Respy.

J. G. McCallum; Agt.
(Copy)
Following is the letter by José María Moro and forwarded to Agent McCallum:

**Agua Caliente, 5. 5. 1885.**

J. G. McCallum, Esq.  
U.S. Ind. Agt.  

Dear Sir.

Enclosed paper was found by us on the door of a little log hut which is on said land. We have held this land and occupied it as a pasture for our animals for many years in fact as long as we have had cattle. The little hut was built by an old man (now dead) who put some of his cows there with our permission. Now this man Fain left some of his things there and we are at a loss what to do. He is a bad man having killed his own uncle and an Indian in San Diego and he is only a boy as yet. Shall we leave him in possession or will you please notify him that said land is ours. Mrs. Jackson and Mr. Kinney left a paper with us that Govt. land held and used by us was not open for entry. We are most anxiously waiting for your reply, as said land is the only place where we can have our animals now that all the fields are under cultivation and planted with wheat, barley, potatoes, corn, beans peas etc. In winter we can have some of them here, but now need that land & as we always have had it we do not know how to get along without it. Oak Grove, San Diego Co. is Wm. Fain's address.

Mr. Lawson has given them a paper also for the possession of the land; the place is known as “Wet Agua.” We have left a paper, where the enclosed was found, telling him that we have always had the land & for him not to make any improvements.

Most respectfully,

Capt. Jose Ma Moro  
& all the Indians of Agua Caliente.  
(Copy)
May 18, 1885
Wells, Van Dyke & Lee.

Dear Sirs:

In the case of the Complaint against William Fain, for trespass on Indian lands not on any reservation, which I referred to you last week, I now inclose a letter from Capt Jose Ma Moro, just received, which gives some further particulars. In case you engage in this matter, you should address “Capt Jose Ma Moro (care of Flora Golsh) Warner P.O. San Diego Co Cal”

Miss Golsh is the teacher of the Indian School there, and well posted in the matter. I do not see what I can do in such cases except to refer them to you. I have no jurisdiction outside of the Reservations. I requested you in my former letter to inform me whether your employment includes such business as the above.

If so I would, and will refer all such matters to you. Otherwise I should not trouble you about them. I think it is clear, that all such matters are for the Courts, and not for the Agent, and of course must be brought before the Courts by Attorneys for the Indians. Please give me your views on this point.

Very Respy

J. G. McCallum, Agt.

(Copy)
Agua Caliente 5. 15. 85.

J. G. McCallum Esq.
U.S. Indian Agt.

Dear Sir.

Bearer of this—Matias Chutnicut & 1 man Francisco Laws take enclosed papers for you to see & hereby I & all men of this village certify & solemnly declare, that said land now occupied by Will Fain has been used by us as a pasture for more than forty years. To prove this we have to show marks on an oak tree a cross and the brand with which some of the cattle are branded. Also 5 little huts made of split pine boards 2 have fallen from age, 3 are standing; there is a good corral & always has been there are signs of the old one & the last one we made has just a few days ago been demolished by Will Fain, Miss Golsh our teacher went up & saw all these things.

She saw the corral in perfectly good condition a post put in the middle & the brands of 3 families carved into the wood. Now the corral has been broken down. He is a bad man, he killed his own uncle & there is no telling what he might do.

We have gone to said place off and on. Many of the men have slept there. If we lose this land our animals will trespass on Gov. Downey’s land or starve.

We most humbly pray in this urgent case for your advice & help.

Very resp.
Jose Ma Moro Capt.
& all the men of
Agua Caliente

But Captain Moro’s letters fell on deaf ears, and nothing was ever done to evict Bill Fain from Lost Valley. On July 22, 1885 he made homestead entry #2381 for 160 acres in the valley. Five years later he was allowed to prove up his claim, and on November 11, 1891 he was issued a patent (deed) by the U.S. Government. By then, Fain had already sold his claim to John Stone of Mesa Grande in June 1890, who in turn transferred it to his brother, Jim Stone, who had been running cattle
in Lost Valley for some time, and is said to have given the valley its mysterious name. Jim Stone sold the land to Aguanga cattleman Henry Bergman in 1897 and his family owned the valley until 1959 when it was sold to the Boy Scouts for a summer camp. Today it is known as Schoepe Scout Reservation at Lost Valley.17

José María Moro saw none of this; he died on July 19, 1885, just three days before Fain formally filed his claim. Moro’s son-in-law, Adolfo Moro, who had adopted the name of his famous father-in-law, followed him as Captain.18 The loss of Lost Valley was another omen of what was to come. In 1892 John Downey filed suit against the Cupeño and four other villages on the Warner Ranch. After a lengthy court battle, in 1901 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against the Indians and in May 1903 they were removed to the reservation at Pala where many of their descendants live to this day.19

NOTES


3. S.S. Lawson to Commissioner of Indian Affairs Hiram Price, July 20, 1883 (NARS, RG75, SC31, LR #13381-1883). The Newtons were Southern California pioneers. Willis Newton (1840-1924) came from Texas in 1865, and eventually settled in Downey. His oldest son, William (1858-1927), farmed in Norwalk for many years. Another son, Jesse, lived in San Diego County, which may explain how the Newtons became aware of Lost Valley.

4. G. Wiley Wells (1840-1909) was a Civil War veteran who practiced law in Mississippi before being elected to Congress in 1875. In 1879 he moved to Los Angeles and formed a partnership with Anson Brunson (1834-1895). When the firm of Brunson & Wells dissolved, he formed the partnership of Wells, Van Dyke & Lee. His junior partner, Bradner Wells Lee, was also his nephew. For a brief biography, see J. M. Guinn, Historical and Biographical Record of Southern California (Chicago: Chapman Publishing Company, 1902), 553. Brunson & Wells were originally retained by Helen Hunt Jackson, who paid their fee out of her own pocket until the U.S. Attorney General agreed to appoint them. Wells continued to serve as Special Attorney for the Mission Indians until 1886. G. Wiley Wells to Secretary of the Interior L.Q.C. Lamar, August 18, 1885, National Archives and Records Service, Record Group 75 (Department of Indian Affairs), SC 31 (Mission Indians in California), Letters Received #19419-1885. Copy courtesy of Valerie Sherer Mathes.

5. All of the early Indian reservations in Southern California were created by Presidential Executive Order. The order of December 27, 1875, created nine reservations spread across the mountains of San Diego County. The order of May 15, 1876, created eight more reservations from the San Gorgonio Pass down to the lower end of the Coachella Valley. The June 1882 order set aside the Pechanga reservation. Some of the other dates listed here represent additions to the existing reservations.


10. There was a change from earlier years when the Register of the Government Land Office in Los Angeles told an Indian Agent: “[T]he location of an Indian family or families on land upon which a white man desires to settle is, in law, no more a bar to such settlement than would be presence of a stray sheep or cow.” Ames, *Report of Special Agent John G. Ames* (1873), 65-66.

11. The original Indian Homestead Law was enacted in 1875, and amended several times. It allowed Indians to make homestead entries of up to 160 acres just as the general law allowed.

12. The village of Cupa was originally considered to be outside the boundaries of the Warner Ranch, and in 1875 an executive order reservation was established there. But in 1880 the final survey of the ranch by the Federal Government took in the village, and the reservation was cancelled. From then on, conflicts between the Cupeño and the owner of the ranch, John Downey, only increased. For a general history of the ranch, see Hill, *The History of Warner’s Ranch and its Environs*.

13. William Berry Fain (1858-1929) had a nasty reputation and a foul mouth that earned him the nickname “Billy Profane.” Born in Tennessee, he followed his uncle, James C. Fain, to the area in the early 1880s and lived for a time on his ranch at Radec, between Temecula and Aguanga. But the two soon had a falling out, and in 1884 Fain did indeed shoot and kill his uncle. The killing was ruled self-defense, but there were always rumors that an Indian witness could have told a different story—if only he could have been found to testify. See the *San Diego Sun*, May 23, 27, 1884. Lester Reed (whose family had their own troubles with Fain) repeats the old rumors in his *Old-Timers of Southeastern California* (Redlands: Citrograph Printing Co., 1967), 100. For sworn testimony of Fain threatening an Indian witness in another shooting incident, see the *San Diego Sun*, March 30, 1887. Early in 1883 Fain settled in the heart of the Cahuilla Indian village at San Ignacio, on what is now the Los Coyotes Indian Reservation. Jackson noted his presence in her *Report* (1883), 23 (though she mistakenly calls him Jim Fane). Further down the mountain, Chatham Helm had moved in on the San Ysidro village. Jackson gives some details in her 1883 article “Captain Pablo’s Story,” reprinted in Valerie Sherer Mathes and Phil Brigandi (eds.), *A Call for Reform: The Southern California Indian Writings of Helen Hunt Jackson* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 161-71. Fain and Helm carried on a long running feud, which the *Union* wrote up like something out of a dime novel in “The Faine [sic]-Helm Case,” *The San Diego Union*, April 5, 1890. Surprisingly, Fain served as Constable in the Warner Ranch area in 1889-90 though it was perhaps more in character that he used his office as an opportunity to further harass Chat Helm. Fain left the area for Arizona around 1891. But that didn’t end his scrapes with the law. In 1901 he was the object of a major manhunt after an accusation of being an accessory to murder. See “An Awful Tragedy,” [Yuma] *Arizona Sentinel*, February 13, 1901, “Fain Would Hide,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1901, and “Fain Gives Himself Up,” [Yuma] *Arizona Sentinel*, February 27, 1901. Once again, Fain seems to have dodged the rap. He remained in Arizona the rest of his life, occasionally visiting his old haunts in San Diego County. He died in 1929 (*The San Diego Union*, March 28, 1929). For an overview of his checkered career, see Phil Brigandi, “Backcountry Badman,” *The High Country*, 65 (Fall 2003), 18-22.

14. A recognizable phonetic transcription of Wiatava, the Cupeño name for Lost Valley. *Wiat is*
the Cupeño word for live oak, so the name can be translated as Place of the Oaks. Lost Valley is identified as Wiatava in William Duncan Strong’s *Aboriginal Society in Southern California* (Berkeley: University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 26, 1929), 245, 271; this is confirmed in the unpublished field notes of both Edward Davis (1907), and John P. Harrington, who visited Lost Valley in 1925.

15. Flora Golsh may have written these letters for Captain Moro. She was born in Austria in 1854 and came to San Diego County with her family in the 1870s. In 1881 she became the first teacher at the new government Indian school at Cupa. In 1883 Jackson described her as a “lady of excellent education and much enthusiasm in her work,” even bringing her piano “up into these wilds” (Jackson, *Report*, 21). Golsh was probably the “F.G.” who was writing the Warner Ranch correspondence for *The San Diego Union* at the time. She noted Jackson’s visit, and said Jackson had “left all the Indians very happy.” *The San Diego Union*, April 26, 1883. In 1890 Golsh transferred to the La Jolla Indian School, where she taught until 1899. She was still living in San Bernardino as late as 1920. For general background on the Golsh family, see Steve Williamson, “The Missing Link, The Source of the Golsh Nobility,” *The High Country*, 77 (Spring 2010), 36-46. For early descriptions of Flora Golsh’s work at Agua Caliente, see “The Nation’s Wards,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 3, 1882, and “An Indian School,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 12, 1886.

16. Matias Chutnicut was born about 1830. He was a clan leader and the grandfather of noted Cupeño elder Roscinda Nolasquez (1892-1987). Francisco Laws (1859-c. 1937) was a Cupeño ceremonial leader. He later lived on the Morongo Indian Reservation. He was one of anthropologist John P. Harrington’s major Cupeño informants in the 1920s.


18. “Dead at Last,” *The San Diego Union*, July 31, 1885. Moro’s grandson, Domingo Moro (1866-1931), was also a prominent community leader, and served as tribal policeman at both Cupa and Pala.


Water Rights to the San Diego River:  
The Opinion of 1914  
By John Martin

“Supplying the city with water is a measure fraught with the weightiest and vital public interest.” San Diego Chamber of Commerce Resolution, 1894.

“The growth of the City of San Diego was clearly determined by its water development.” Water Committee Meeting, San Diego Chamber of Commerce, 1913.

By late 1913 San Diego’s municipal water bureaucrats had reached another juncture in their effort to shape the hydrologic landscape of their city. Their quest for water self-sufficiency had moved from using wells and pumps and water from the San Diego Flume to the acquisition of several privately owned water systems, namely the San Diego Water Company and the Southern California Mountain Water Company. Increasingly the city came to rely on its fledgling water system but water experts also recognized its limitations as San Diego’s water driven growth approached a point of stasis.

Regional climatic conditions determined that water in San Diego was a perpetual dilemma. Indeed by the early twentieth century, the city had more hope than water. But water, not ambition, actuated growth. Civic pride, economic ambition, and the rivalry with Los Angeles to become the queen city of the southern coast fueled the municipal vision of the city fathers. This optimistic vision could only be sated with a stable water supply. So by necessity San Diego city water advocates assumed what historian Eliza Martin called the “growth

John Martin is a frequent contributor to The Journal of San Diego History with his most recent article entitled “A Tale of the Cabrillo Statues,” Fall 2014, Vol. 60, No. 4. John specializes in San Diego’s military history and San Diego’s development in the early 1900s. He is presently doing research on the dams of western San Diego County and working on a history of the San Diego River.
by the gallon” mentality of finding and using any water resource to facilitate municipal growth.¹ This philosophy forced San Diego’s city leaders to continuously ponder how best to consolidate the town’s water future with the resources available.

The majority of the earliest private entrepreneurial land development enterprises of Land and Water Company, the Mt. Tecate Land and Water Company, the San Felipe Desert Land and Water Company, and the Santa Maria Land and Water Company, all offered business opportunities and promoted growth possibilities to the aspiring city by combining land and water. These developers promoted the vision that water would “turn the parched land into vernal freshness.”² It was an uneven symbiotic relationship. Land was plentiful, but not so water. In practice, private corporations most often promised to deliver more water than was at their disposal—resulting in an unreliable supply when no municipal system existed.

While civic-minded San Diegans grappled with the water dilemma, they also accepted the
Progressive era notion that government should wield power in the public interest. This influenced their belief that the municipality should own and operate its water system as a community enterprise. The *San Diego Sun* admonished the city to follow the lead of Los Angeles and invest in its water infrastructure. In a 1912 article entitled “Future Growth of San Diego will Demand a Large Water Supply,” S. R. Frazier, a local self-proclaimed water expert, argued that San Diego’s water situation demanded that the city act immediately to secure an adequate water supply. Frazier declared that water was the cornerstone of municipal growth and the time was nearing when the city’s limited water system could not provide for the city in a prolonged drought.³

Responding to the community clamor city administrators sought the creation of a comprehensive municipal water system independent of private concerns. Local newspapers badgered the same officials to “fight and fight without ceasing” for water to grow the city, and members of the influential Chamber of Commerce preached that the “future growth and prosperity” of the city hinged on an adequate city-managed water mandate that municipal expansion depended upon a reliable water supply from a city-managed system.⁴ To this end a Chamber of Commerce spokesperson noted that the city was “digging and damming” and buying water as the demand required.⁵ All parties realized that a serviceable owned system depended on tapping all the available water resources.

The city planners’ agenda for an independent water system recognized that control of the San Diego River, the county’s largest water resource, was the lynch pin. To solidify the city’s claim to the river, a right that during the past decade had morphed from need to necessity, city legal pundits produced a position paper in early 1914 entitled *An Opinion on the Rights of the City of San Diego to the Waters of the San Diego River*. The document was another benchmark in the city’s march toward water sustainability. The *Opinion* stated the city’s presumptive right to the San Diego River and provided the legal framework and cogent talking points used in subsequent litigation to take possession of its waters.

**The San Diego River**

Scarcity made water a valuable commodity in semi-arid San Diego as it added value to the land and impacted the potential of municipal growth. The county’s river systems and topography combined with the prevailing hydrology to predetermine the city would engineer a water solution through the construction of large conservation dams and reservoirs. In these pursuits the city and private corporations tapped the county’s most available water for irrigation and domestic sources but left the San Diego River catchment largely undeveloped. Pumping
plants in the river basins fed off the subsurface water while the San Diego Flume
conserved and distributed water from the lower river. In the annual rainy season
and during flood episodes the bulk of the river water inexorably flowed, unused,
into the Pacific Ocean. Then in 1914, civic leaders, the San Diego Common Council,
prominent businessmen, private entrepreneurs, the members of the influential
Chamber of Commerce, and the citizens Committee of Fifty accepted the necessity
of establishing control of the entire San Diego River if their visions of municipal
growth were to be realized.

The San Diego River, the only river to transit city limits, originated in the
northeastern backcountry where seasonal rainfall and the resulting runoff
generated its flow. As the tributaries fed the catchment, the river dropped almost
4000 feet as it coursed south and west fifty-two miles to the Pacific Ocean; but like
all southwestern rivers the San Diego was a mercurial river. A long time resident
characterized it as a “now you see it, now you don’t” river. On occasion the river
ran steady and smooth, quenching the townspeople’s thirst and watering their
crops. Sometimes it ran dry and deprived and tormented them, and periodically
it raged downstream inundating the river valley, taking their lives, and destroying their property. It was a river that seemed to confound the people it helped sustain. Regardless of its characteristics, in 1914 the river remained the most consequential and largest underdeveloped water resource in the county.

River historian William Wright’s sentiment that water in San Diego was the “precious thing that keen men went after; developing it if they could and trying to tie it up in their own names if they couldn’t” aptly applied to the San Diego River. By 1913 the notion of controlling the river waters had evolved from a serious consideration to a complicated necessity. Developing San Diego’s eponymous river required civic vision to claim its waters. As city leaders struggled with these issues, they also had to deal with an intractable tenant—local real estate and water entrepreneur Ed Fletcher. In the late 1880s the San Diego Flume Company dammed Cuyamaca Lake, placed a diverting dam at the confluence of the San Diego River and Boulder Creek, constructed a thirty-two mile long wooden flume, and started to transport the water to consumers in the El Cajon Valley. In 1910 Montana businessman James Murray, with Fletcher as a minority partner and designated manager, purchased the Flume and renamed it the Cuyamaca Water Company [CWC]. City officeholders and Fletcher held diametrically opposed views on controlling the river. Fletcher hoped to see the city grow, but the struggle for the river water was also a business matter, as more water and river developments increased the value of his water company and brought value to his east county lands. For the leaders of the aspiring municipality it was a visceral matter of acquiring a sustainable water source to insure continuity and expansion.

Soon after the CWC started operations several tangential river water affairs piqued concern in the city offices and gradually polarized the view of who would regulate the San Diego River. In 1911 W. B. Hamilton filed an application for
40 billion gallons per year of surplus river water for irrigation and domestic purposes. Working with San Diego Judge Lendel L. Boone, Hamilton planned to divert and store water on the El Capitan Grande Reservation lands on the lower river. The scheme interfered with Fletcher’s plans for the CWC, which compelled him to formally question the filing, which in turn ignited a long legal scramble. A 1912 report from Charles Lee, a CWC water engineer, addressed how the CWC’s increased use of river water in the river basins could affect riparian users. Lee suggested that the company was drawing “too heavily” on the sub-surface basins and would probably deplete the supply to the point where the users could not withstand a three-year drought. The report concluded with a suggestion, in the city’s estimation a threat, that the CWC should construct a surface storage reservoir on the river to mitigate the potential problem.

Another water episode, which originated in the 1890s, abetted the burgeoning rivalry between Fletcher and the city. The dispute had its roots in a conflict between San Diego Flume owner Joseph W. Sefton and John D. Spreckels and his Southern California Mountain Water Company (SCMWC) when they contested the right to supply the city water. This disagreement featured Spreckels, a strong advocate of using the majority of regional water resources for domestic applications and developing the city, with Sefton more concerned about backcountry consumers. When the city chose the SCMWC, Sefton unsuccessfully attempted to sell the Flume to the city for $900,000. With ample water supplies available from the Spreckels concern, the city ignored the offer. Two years after Murray purchased the Flume, the CWC became entangled in that same rivalry. In the resulting newspaper war, the Spreckels’ interests painted Fletcher as a profit-minded opportunist while suggesting that the civic-minded Spreckels would use his earnings to construct an eastern railroad route to assist in the growth of the city. Those who opposed Spreckels became labeled Socialists. Fletcher later stated that Spreckels’ social and civic status, the intense public pressure, and his newspaper unduly exerted influence on the Common Council to purchase the SCMWC.

Fletcher later exacerbated the testy relationship with the city when he acquired
lands at a dam site in Mission Gorge and when he purchased a potential El Capitan dam site on the river. The city likewise stirred the contention when it acquired lands below Old Mission Dam in Mission Gorge. The need to improve the city’s water system prompted city officials to sponsor several special water bond elections. On October 21, 1913, the electorate passed a $645,000 bond issue to improve the city system, $200,000 for an emergency system for pumping water from the bed of the San Diego River, and $75,000 to extend the city distribution system. In January 1914 the voters again approved the $645,000 for improvements and this time $60,000 for a filtration plant. But these actions were improvements not resolutions. By late 1913 the Common Council, harboring the belief that the growth of the city hinged on controlling the river waters, opened a campaign to assert the city’s right to the river.

The Opinion on the City’s Rights to Water of the San Diego River

The river skirmishes between the city and the CWC set the tone and established the strategic legal benchmarks for the next fifteen years. City civil servants operated under the implicit assumption that the city possessed the right to all the waters of the river. In light of this assumption Fletcher and the CWC

In 1911 Ed Fletcher, through an intermediary, purchased a potential dam site on the San Diego River below El Capitan Mountain that would become the center of controversy for the next two decades. Courtesy San Diego City Water History Archive.
and east county water consumers worried that the city would reach a population point where its domestic need would deprive them of a water source they had used for the past thirty years. It was a delicate balance. When the CWC pressed the city on river rights, the city deflected the pressure with feigned insouciance; when the city pressed Fletcher he responded with feigned confidence. All the while the status of the river remained uncertain.

Determined to resolve the impasse, on November 3, 1913, the members of the Common Council—Henry N. Manney, O. M. Schmidt, Herbert R. Fay and Daniel K. Adams with Percy J. Benbough absent, passed City Resolution #15534, which directed City Attorney Terence Cosgrove to investigate the city’s right to the waters of the San Diego River. The Council specifically wanted a document that would both delineate the city’s position and establish its claim to the river. To do this Cosgrove systematically perused Spanish and Mexican colonial historical records, documents, and laws, and pertinent court decisions. Cosgrove presented his response, “An Opinion on the Rights of the City of San Diego to the Waters of the San Diego River,” to the City Council on January 5, 1914, which the five members promptly adopted. Years later Shelley Higgins, a member of Cosgrove’s staff in 1914 and a future city attorney, wrote that the Opinion’s quest for the river was a product of the persistent fear of drought and “public agitation and necessity.” The Council’s motivation clearly reflected the views of municipal boosters who believed control of the river would mitigate civic apprehensions about an adequate water supply and stimulate growth.

To create historic perspective, Cosgrove researched colonial records and applied the concept of judicial notice, which allows an attorney to introduce facts that...
The Water Rights Opinion of 1914

experts have authoritatively attested to be true. Cosgrove asserted that when the respective Spanish and Mexican governments organized the pueblo of San Diego as a colonial institution, those governments also determined that the pueblo would grow alongside but separate from the mission and share in the protection the presidio accorded. The crux of the contention declared that the colonial laws guaranteed the pueblo the right to claim water for the use of the citizens and that right superseded those of the mission and the presidio. While the governments did not award specific water grants to the pueblos, government officials framed the right to use water as a natural entitlement that was implicit in pueblo lands rights for the use of its inhabitants. Those rights of property transferred to the new American town. Cosgrove also outlined how upon achieving statehood in 1850, the San Diego Trustees petitioned and won control of the Pueblo Lands and the associated water rights for municipal use.13

In the document Cosgrove also considered if the city had in any manner forfeited its pueblo status. In the answer Cosgrove imposed rhetoric over reason and brashly averred that given the facts and citations of his research it was “beyond question or quibble” that anyone with “intelligent judgment” could dispute
that San Diego was the pueblo successor. As to the question of adverse possession, he argued that the city had continuously accessed the river waters so there was not hiatus of use and that the unbroken title to property and water held by a city that was the successor to a pueblo could not be lost in that fashion.14

Cosgrove buttressed his arguments with the precedents of recent legal decisions. He specifically described the Vernon Irrigation Company v The City of Los Angeles case of 1895 where attorney John Godfrey, lead council for the City of Los Angeles, applied the pueblo theory to gain that city exclusive water rights to the Los Angeles River. Cosgrove also examined Godfrey’s argument in Feliz v The City of Los Angeles where the city successfully claimed the use of all of the waters of the Los Angeles River. Godfrey held that no entity could interfere with the city’s right to use the river and “the city could take the water from any point on the river wherever at will.”15

When the state and federal courts upheld Vernon, Cosgrove was confident that with the application of the same strategy San Diego would likewise attain the “prior and paramount right” to the San Diego River.16

Cosgrove believed that the historical facts, the decisions of the state, and the arguments presented in the Opinion clearly affirmed that the city had the prior and paramount right to use the waters for the general public and for all municipal purposes. Allowing his literary enthusiasm to flow, Cosgrove concluded that the city’s right was for the “entire river from bed rock to surface, and from the tiny rivulet that trickles down from the rim of the great watershed, to the shimmering sands where the bed of the San Diego meets the sea.”17

The public response to the Opinion was surprisingly subdued. Cosgrove later admitted that on the day the newspapers printed the announcement it just seemed like a routine news item. On January 5, the San Diego Sun wrote that Cosgrove declared in thirty typewritten pages of often “flowery phrases” that the city had “first call” on the river water. The Sun explained Cosgrove’s research and the use of historical records as the basis for his conclusion, but downplayed the implications of the piece and instead noted how Cosgrove ignored “bewildering, ponderous” legal terms and inserted some human nature into his opinion.18

The San Diego
Union relegated the news to page five and the next day modestly noted that the “Oldest Records Show City’s Right to San Diego River.”19 In his annual message to the city on January 6, Mayor Charles O’Neill included a recommendation to secure the El Capitan dam site, but made no mention of the Opinion.20 It appeared that the issuance of the Opinion was not a moment appreciated at the time.

Fletcher, on the other hand, sharply rejoined through a series of newspaper interviews that he was ready to “go on the war path” to protect his interests on the river. Respective headlines declared he was willing to “Fight for River Water Rights,” and believed the “Rights of City to Water a Joke.” Fletcher pointed out that the Flume wondered why the city had waited until now to acknowledge its claim to the river.21 In Fletcher’s estimation the Opinion was an adversarial attempt to squelch his river enterprise.

The Common Council held no illusions about the Opinion’s intent. The Council served notice of the municipality’s paramount right to the river waters with City Resolution #17382 in May 1914. The resolution stated that because “certain persons, individuals and companies” were contemplating further development of the San Diego River, the Council and the city Board of Water Commissioners were compelled to reassert the city’s prior right to the river waters.22 While the Council’s statement was more precedential than legal it clearly stated the city’s position regarding the river and set the parameters for the ensuing protracted legal struggle. The council also created a Citizens Advisory Water Committee to consult with the city attorney and city hydraulic engineer in future water investigations for acquiring additional water for the city, a move Fletcher no doubt perceived as another city incited irritant directed at his interests.23

Public administrators used the Opinion to establish the municipal right to the river and generate a defensible legal position. Along with the city’s claim to the waters the Opinion also manufactured a blueprint of evidential documentation to defend against the anticipated litigation. Prior to 1914 the city’s strategy to control the river, and deflect private designs, was implied rather than stated. With the Opinion the city abandoned its passive stance, stated its new philosophy, and

City Hydraulic Engineer Hiram N. Savage was an advocate of placing a dam on the San Diego River in Mission Gorge. Courtesy of the Hoppe Family.
initiated administrative action. Cosgrove’s conclusions became the city’s manifesto to defend its water right and develop the river for municipal purposes. The city’s change in strategy and new course of action was timely. In Higgins’ view the city had been “sleeping” on those river rights far too long and needed to assert its hegemony over the river. In a tangible display of the Common Council’s appreciation of Cosgrove’s efforts that body approved an immediate increase in his salary.24

The revelations of the Opinion also tangentially spawned a prolonged debate over the location of a dam to conserve the river waters once the ownership question was resolved. Fletcher owned a site in Mission Gorge and the El Capitan site, while the city also possessed a Mission Gorge locale. The city became so consumed and divided with the debate over where to construct a dam that the Common Council finally resorted to submitting the question to a public vote in the fall of 1924. Fred Heilbron, the majority of the Common Council, City Manager Fred Rhodes, and City Attorney Higgins joined forces against City Hydrologist Savage, Mayor John Bacon, Fletcher, and the majority of the Chamber of Commerce to defeat a ballot measure to fund a gorge dam. On September 10, 1924 the electorate endorsed by a 3-1 margin the site at El Capitan and a November ballot reconfirmed their intention with the passage of a $4,500,000 bond issue to construct the El Capitan Dam and Reservoir. Politics aside, it was another seven years before the courts decided where the dam would be and who would control the river.

The Pueblo Water Rights Theory

The core of the Opinion was the legal stratagem called the pueblo water rights theory. Los Angeles attorney John Godfrey contrived the theory as a strategy for the 1895 Vernon case. Historian Norris Hundley suggested that Godfrey manufactured the theory and stressed the rights of the community over the individual, a philosophy the Progressive minded judiciary appeared willing to accept to assist municipal development. In Hundley’s estimation, the theory was counter to the basic water principles of appropriation doctrine and riparianism,
which Californians accepted. In retrospect legal historian Peter L. Reich argued that in defense of the theory state judges favored municipalities, ignored the traditional legal tenets, and knowingly adjudicated rulings counter to the original Spanish and Mexican law. Water rights expert Wells Hutchins thought the pueblo water rights theory rested on a series of judicial notice presumptions and called the treatment of the Spanish and Mexican laws in the California cases “sketchy” and based on a “very narrow foundation.” He also supported the adverse possession saying the theory supplanted the rights of private interests that had exercised beneficial use to consumers for many years. For the judges to accept the pueblo rights theory, the city legal team had to prove to the court’s satisfaction that San Diego was the successor to the original Pueblo of San Diego established in 1769. The date of 1769 applies to the founding of the mission since the Pueblo was not founded until 1834. Conversely Fletcher’s mission became one of dissuasion.

The pueblo water rights theory was the most applicable and persuasive argument available for the city to gain control of the San Diego River. The city’s history, the location of the river within city boundaries, and the earlier legal success of the City of Los Angeles under similar circumstances, gave San Diego an advantage. Also the city’s rising status with the navy and the federal government predicated on San Diego’s strategic harbor overriding the opposition’s compelling arguments, provided the city a strong position. This remained true even when the La Mesa, Lemon Grove, and Spring Valley Irrigation District became involved in the fray which pitted two municipalities as contestants. Without the pueblo water rights, California’s traditional riparian and appropriative rights concepts, and lacking an Owens Valley option, the city might have purchased the CWC, certainly a quicker and less expensive option. It also could have acquired the North County’s San Dieguito system earlier and pursued the Colorado River resource more aggressively. The civic leaders, however, comfortable in their pueblo strategy, and despite Fletcher’s anti-pueblo optimism, remained committed to the San Diego River option.

In the context of the time the Opinion appeared to favor San Diego’s quest for the river. As Riech suggested, Progressive era courts and state and federal government agencies supported municipal growth. In 1915 when the city prepared to submit its application for the El Capitan dam site to the Land Office Committee, and to the U. S. Congress in the form of HR #11540, Secretary of Interior Frank Lane, who earlier ruled for the city in the Hamilton Affair, read the application, and freely suggested several changes regarding maps, right-of-ways and payment to the Indians on the Reservations lands. Cosgrove incorporated Lane’s recommendations, which included compensation for the natives and the provision
that the waters were not exclusively for San Diego and its distribution affiliates and the Council quickly approved the revised document. The amended bill advanced to the committee level in Congress and Cosgrove traveled to Washington to defend it in May 1916. In July the commissioner for the Land Office in Los Angeles dismissed an appeal from the CWC against the city’s application for condemnation of the El Capitan lands.

In applying the principles of the *Opinion*, by 1916 the city had staked its claim to the river and appeared poised to capture the dam site that was the key to developing the river. The civic notion that water was tied to population increase appeared also flatlined at approximately 71,000 citizens. The arrival of the US Navy and the infusion of the military facilities after 1919 tipped the economic balance and gave the city its economic niche and growth incentive. Civic leaders and residents recognized the importance of developing the San Diego River but spent another fifteen years securing the river and deciding where to conserve its waters.

Years before the case reached the courtroom Fletcher’s defense team anticipated tactics to counter the city’s pueblo driven strategy. In the early 1920s CWC Attorney Charles Crouch hired A. A. Gottesburen, a self-proclaimed expert on colonial institutions, to gather historical data to contradict the theory. But even as Gottesburen researched, some of the defense team doubted his capacity to cull authentic and authoritative materials from pertinent historical documents and library collections. Indeed Crouch worried that some of the materials were not “sufficiently comprehensive and authentic to meet our needs.” Nevertheless the team formulated Gottesburen’s information to create a 172 page loose-leaf notebook to serve as a trial exhibit to prove that rather then being a “successor of a pure or agricultural pueblo” San Diego was the successor to the presidio that was established to protect the pueblo. In this scenario Fletcher’s lawyers argued that the King of Spain granted the land and all waters to the inhabitants within the San Diego Mission not the town. The defense believed the pueblo water rights theory was vulnerable because the city had “no support in the
Laws of the Indies and none under California Supreme Court decisions.” In Fletcher’s mind, the city’s case was not well founded and his defense team would “knock out” the pueblo concept in the courtroom. When the city filed in March 1923, a compatriot of Fletcher cavalierly remarked that he was surprised the city had so much faith that the CWC would prevail in the court.

Fletcher’s team attempted to create an opposing historic precedent to discredit the Opinion’s historical base. Crouch specifically referred to a 1773 letter to Father Junípero Serra his researchers found in the Bancroft Library. The document called for Serra to move the mission from a site near Presidio Hill into Mission Valley and construct a dam on the river. The water from the dam would be for the benefit of all people who may reside within the jurisdiction of the Mission for perpetuity. Further, the waters of the San Diego River were withheld from the settlement of San Diego when the government secularized the missions. Crouch argued that the government withheld the water rights of the river from the pueblo, then, with secularization, the water rights passed to the State of California, not the city. In Crouch’s interpretation of the letter the government never intended for San Diego to become a pueblo and the local landowners should garner the rights to the river. In this interpretation the pueblo water rights argument was moot. Using this line of reasoning, Crouch challenged the city to incontrovertibly prove that the Spanish intended San Diego to be a pueblo and that the water rights passed to individual landowners, not the state.

Rather than becoming a defining piece of evidence, questions arose about the Serra letter’s provenance and validity. Where was it from 1773 to 1923 and how did the Bancroft come to possess it? Why was the document not cited in any of the early basic histories of San Diego? Fletcher donated the letter to the Serra Museum in 1950, noting that one of his attorneys had procured it in 1923. It was later declared a fraud. The Diocesan Historical Commission examined the letter for the Cause of the Beatification of Fray Junípero Serra and declared it and another Serra document as fake. Diocesan experts agreed with the “scholars and evaluators” that it was a clear case of forgery and “hence spurious and valueless.”
In a final note of desperation, Crouch failed in efforts to compensate the respected University of California Professor Herbert Bolton to testify as an expert witness in support of the document.

As the prospect of a legal confrontation loomed, the focus of the contesting parties polarized on supporting or refuting the Opinion’s pueblo water rights theory that San Diego was the successor to the colonial original pueblo as Cosgrove advocated in the Opinion.

Ed Fletcher and the Opinion

For almost twenty years the struggle for the river pitted the John D. Spreckels business coterie and his supporters on the Common Council, which represented the city in water matters, against Fletcher and the CWC. Over the course of time the sides debated the type of dam to be constructed and its location, but in 1914 the core issue centered on who would control the river.33 City officials appreciated the implicit threat Fletcher and the CWC posed with their designs on the river and hence to the city’s water future. Fletcher left no doubt he planned to continue taking water from the upper river and damming and improving the CWC system. Fletcher campaigned that improvements would aid the city, but as San Diego historian Theodore Strathman has argued, the businessman also understood the additional water delivered to the east county would add value to his personal real estate holdings.34 If city administrators only tacitly directed the Opinion at Fletcher and his CWC interests, their river claim formalized the rift and in fact initiated a more strident posture when dealing with him.

In Spring 1914, during talks between the Common Council and Fletcher over the charges the CWC would levy for water, the council passed a resolution that emphasized that the talks could not be construed in any way to “impair or prejudice” the city’s rights to the river. City administrators wanted to be perfectly clear that purchasing water from the CWC did not in any way present a stipulation in the city’s claim to the river.35 The foundations of the legal struggle between the city and Fletcher over the river were based on vested interest. The city leaders represented a municipality with designs for growth and expansion. Fletcher was a businessman looking to profit. This is not to say that Fletcher was opposed to civic growth, which would tangentially enhance his interests, but in the early decades of the 20th century his managerial association with the CWC was premised as an entrepreneurial enterprise.36

Fletcher rightfully considered Cogrove’s Opinion a provocative statement. The city directed the document at individuals or groups who took or intended to take river water for business purposes. The Opinion essentially preempted any use by
other individuals or agencies. The target of the implication was clear. Aside from private landowners the CWC was the only water enterprise on the river. Fletcher argued through the newspapers and the public meetings that the Opinion was the city’s first indication it was claiming rights to the river. The San Diego Flume had operated since 1888 and the CWC since 1910, so why had public officials waited until 1914 to initiate action? Fetcher observed, not coincidentally, that the Opinion came when the CWC directors were considering the El Capitan project and other upper river improvements. The Opinion was for the “sole purpose of annoying, vexing and harassing” him and hindering the development of the CWC.37

A tangential wrinkle appeared when the La Mesa Irrigation District offered to purchase the CWC. As Fletcher quarreled with the city, he recognized that in selling the company he could avoid becoming consumed in expensive and protracted litigation. He was ready to sell. The city skeptically eyed the transaction, worried that the District as a municipal entity would be a stronger antagonist than Fletcher. The matter eventually found its way before the State Railroad Commission where Fletcher demanded $1,000,000 plus an additional $350,000 for what he termed the system’s strategic value. The Commission members balked. In 1913 the Commission ruled that the system should be rebuilt, believing that in its current state, the system would last no more than four years, and it also established a market value of $745,000 for the system. The District attempted to close the deal at the Commission’s valuation but Fletcher demurred. The District later filed suit with the Commission to force the sale, but a State Court denied the request.38

Even as Fletcher considered the ramifications of the Opinion, he moved forward with plans to develop the river. In 1914, two years after the city chose the Spreckels-owned Southern California Mountain Water Company over the CWC as its principal water supplier, Fletcher acquired 160 acres that belonged to Mrs. William J. Kehner and some acreage on the El Capitan Indian Reservation lands,
including a dam site below Mt. El Capitan. Fletcher had local rancher George Sawday purchase the river land for him in order to “not arouse suspicion.” At the time of the transaction the directors of the CWC would now have “to deal with Fletcher.”

As predicted, the control of this dam site dovetailed into a city-Fletcher confrontation. A disgruntled former CWC employee, C.T. Sackett, apparently purloined some CWC survey documents and then convinced his friend W.B. Hamilton to file for land on the Indian Reservation that included the dam site. Watching the affair unfold and sensing the gravity of controlling the city’s interest on the river, Chamber of Commerce President Rufus Choate entered a protest with the Department of Interior in October 1914 arguing against any future actions by Fletcher, Hamilton, or any other city or corporation that desired to secure control of any reservoir sites on the El Capitan Indian Reservation.

In the end, the Department of Interior, acting through the Los Angeles Land Office, rejected Hamilton’s request. Hamilton and his associate local Judge Boone then offered the filing to the city. Boone informed the Common Council of the value of these lands and urged the members to immediately act on the transfer to “secure the greatest advantage” for the city. The council agreed and when the city became the assignee, Cosgrove re-filed a motion with the Secretary of Interior for supervisory power over the matter and petitioned for a hearing at the Land Office in Los Angeles. The Land Committee reconsidered the case and overturned Hamilton’s rejection and Secretary of Interior Frank Lane quickly approved the city’s submission. With the decision, as Fletcher put it, “the fight was on.”

The aggressive rhetoric of the Opinion certainly enhanced the possibility of litigation between the city and private interests. The reigning city political leaders believed the waters of the river belonged to the city and were prepared to litigate to protect his investment. To enhance his investment, and in compliance with the mandates of the 1912 State Railroad Commission, Fletcher improved the CWC to make it a more efficient system. Businessman Fletcher saw the improvements as an opportunity to enlist additional consumers and increase users’ rates. He saw the future of the backcountry in the domestic expansion of the east county and wanted to reap that potential, but he irritated some river riparian owners when the CWC sold water to the city for a lower rate than to the ranchers. Faced with the ramifications of the Opinion, Fletcher, who undoubtedly had a personal animus motivating his actions, would not allow the matter to go uncontested. Confident the courts would expose and reject the myth of the so-called pueblo water rights theory, Fletcher gathered his legal team and prepared the litigation.

The CWC was an older yet functioning system, so as he proceeded, Fletcher must have pondered why city administrators deflected his overtures to sell them
the system. Fletcher rightfully linked the rejection of his sales offers to the belief of city officials that the municipality already owned the river water. In effect, any recognition the CWC’s position potentially mitigated the city’s stance. Fletcher reiterated this sentiment during the 1918 Congressional hearings before the Committee on Public Lands when on the witness stand he testified that he was told (he never identified by whom) that Cosgrove opposed the sale of the CWC to the city because it “might be recognizing the Cuyamaca Water Company’s right of ownership to the waters of the San Diego River.”

It is important to appreciate that the conflicting agendas of Fletcher and the confrontation. A third party observer suggested there was a modicum of merit to Fletcher’s belief that the City Council opposed him. There were misunderstandings that exacerbated the relationship, but it appeared that the Council did not approach the sales offers with “trustful enthusiasm.” It seemed that the Council and Fletcher functioned in an atmosphere where each worried that one party was always trying to “put one over” on the other. It was small town politics personified.

The Opinion Postscript

References to the Opinion arguments reappeared over the next fifteen years whenever the litigants contended over the rights to the San Diego River. Fletcher actually came within a breath of winning the first court confrontation. Judge Perry J. Wood presiding in the San Diego Superior Court in 1922 rejected the city’s pueblo theory as “contrary to law and justice.” Nevertheless, when Fletcher’s attorney Charles Crouch failed to submit pertinent paperwork within the required time frame, the city’s legal team managed to withdraw the case before the court rendered a decision. Had Crouch submitted the papers expeditiously, the court would probably have found for Fletcher and dealt the theory at least a temporary setback.

When Fletcher and Cosgrove faced off in the 1918 House Congressional hearings on the “Conservation and Storage of Water,” and in the courtroom thereafter, much of the argument centered on the tenets of the Opinion.

In the 1918 Congressional hearings, San Diego Congressman William Kettner set the tone of the meeting with a statement explaining the city’s need
for an increased water supply. Fletcher testified that the city’s agenda was to gain control of the CWC, secure the El Capitan site at a minimal price, and that congressional approval would negatively affect the El Cajon Valley consumers and inhibit the CWC’s continued improvement. Throughout Fletcher claimed adverse possession and blasted the “mythical” pueblo water rights theory. Cosgrove benignly offered that the city was looking to conserve water for the city’s inhabitants and control flood events. During the proceedings, Cosgrove leaned on the Opinion for substance and clearly attempted to create the impression that Fletcher and the CWC were focused on private gain rather than civic improvement.47

In the 1923 court proceedings Shelley Higgins used the arguments in the Opinion to establish the city’s case but also offered the testimony of long-time residents to create an element of precedent. Through the witnesses Higgins established the city’s use and reliance on the river waters to buttress the pueblo theory. For example, Crouch asked one witness, Mrs. Willeta Benton, if to her knowledge anyone had ever mentioned the idea of the city having paramount rights before 1914. Benton, according to Higgins’ recollection and to Crouch’s chagrin, answered that indeed there were men who lived in San Diego for many years who “took it that the pueblo had a right to the waters of the San Diego River.” Several other old-timers voiced similar points of view.48

As the affair labored through hearings and courtrooms, Fletcher, frustrated with his attempts to sell to the city over the past decade, considered the time and expense involved in further litigation and decided to offer the system to the La Mesa Irrigation District. The District approved a $2,500,000 bond and purchased the CWC in January 1926. After the sale Fletcher ruminated that had he known the city would pursue the paramount rights agenda he would never have invested in the enterprise. For years the District and the city engaged in talks over control of the river, but both accepted that the courts would settle the matter.

After multiple trials, Judge Conkling declared the city’s position valid. Throughout the city, legal pundits presented a history of San Diego supporting the pueblo water right and the opposition countered the pueblo argument and claimed adverse possession. Conkling’s decision granted twenty-seven cubic feet of water per second to the Irrigation District because the city had not challenged the District’s right to divert water in the past and because many of the east county communities were dependent on that water. The city had paramount rights but the court did not specify the quantity of water it could withdraw. With neither side satisfied, the Chamber again offered to mediate a settlement to develop the river, but the only progress was the march toward an appeal.

The court finally ended the years of controversy in March 1930 when a seven-
member superior court panel rendered a decision on the appeal. The members accepted the Pueblo Water Rights concept and declared that the La Mesa Irrigation District, the CWC and the landowners were riparian users of the river and as such had no title to it. The question was about the right to the water not the amount taken. When the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case, the river belonged to the city.

In December 1931 the city and the La Mesa Irrigation District reached an agreement that truly ended the legal imbroglio. The District retained Cuyamaca Dam, the El Monte Pumping Station, wells along the river, and the right to store and distribute water through El Capitan and received two million gallons of water per day. The city took store and access to 5000 acre feet of water from the Murray Reservoir. Both the Irrigation District’s attorney Albert J. Lee and City Attorney Buyers pressed their respective clients to immediately sign the “peace terms” and end the litigation. When city and district representatives agreed to jointly construct additional distribution lines the parties signed papers. In the end the Irrigation District, and vicariously the CWC, lost the decision but won the water.

Conclusion

The perpetual dilemma of creating a reliable water supply to facilitate an expanding municipality was an ubiquitous predicament in San Diego’s civic psyche. Having tapped the most accessible water sources and still confronted with a water-driven growth impasse, in 1913-1914 city officials turned their attention to the under-developed San Diego River, a source they believed offered a tangible resolution to their dilemma.

The water landscape on the river, however, was an unsettled environment. Specifically there could not be two masters on the river. After the assumption of the San Diego Flume Company, the Cuyamaca Water Company, under the aggressive management of Ed Fletcher, proposed to improve and expand its operation on the upper river and increase supply to east country consumers. Fletcher viewed the relationship between the CWC and the city in light of the old western water aphorism that suggested it was better to be upstream with a shovel and a ditch than downstream with a decree. And that is how the city officials reacted. Since city officials were reticent to solve the issue with the purchase of the CWC, the only viable alternative was to devise a legal strategy to counter the CWC’s physical presence on the river. Thus, perceiving boosters considered proprietary and indispensible, the Common Council authorized City Attorney Terence Cosgrove to author a document to clarify and protect the city’s right to the river waters. In stating that right, Cosgrove’s Opinion of 1914 also supported
the city’s paradigm of municipal expansion.

The *Opinion* was a salient document if for no other reason than it contained the water rights theory that became the basis of the city’s claim to the San Diego River. Cosgrove’s iteration of the Pueblo Water Rights theory, a tactic a Los Angeles legal team used to secure the Los Angeles River for that city, was the most applicable and compelling argument available. Historical precedent emphasizing community need became the core of the city’s legal engagement. Significantly the Progressive era judiciary also accepted the notion that the public need took precedent over private corporations and that a water utility system was a municipal service franchise that should be city operated and controlled. Even when the contest became between two municipalities, the court appeared to favor the domestic water use in urban areas over the agricultural needs of a rural community.

The *Opinion* offered the template legal counsel utilized in the hearings and court sessions over the next decade and a half to gain the river and served the purpose for which it was intended. But it should be noted that winning the river was a transitory victory. San Diego’s water woes persisted as the area’s expanding population continued to outstrip the gallons available, which forced the city to seek water resources outside the region.

Years after the city won the paramount case, Shelley Higgins, who succeeded Cosgrove as City Attorney and served as the city’s lead legal counsel at the later court proceedings, recounted that he had read and studied the document in his preparations for the case. In his view the *Opinion* was a “notable contribution to the City’s legal foundations” and the theory was correct in the “minutest detail.” Bias aside, the *Opinion* exerted a salient influence on the final legal decision to grant San Diego the control of the river and promote the viability of regional and metropolitan growth.

**NOTES**


12. Shelley Higgins, *This Fantastic City San Diego*. (San Diego: City of San Diego, 1956), 4. Hereinafter cited as Higgins. The existence of a “pueblo water right” has been discredited. See Daniel Tyler, *The Mythical Pueblo Rights Doctrine: Water Administration in Hispanic New Mexico* (El Pasc: Texas Western Press, 1990). The introduction by Iris H. W. Engstrand (pp. 1-10) points out how there was no such right in the water laws of Spain and Mexico as they applied in Hispanic California.


22. City Resolution, #17382, May 27, 1914.

23. City Resolution, #18098, September 3, 1914.


27. Colonel Ed Fletcher Collection, MS 135, San Diego History Center Document Series, Cuyamaca Water Company: San Diego River Rights, Letter, Crouch to Fletcher, March 27, 1922, Fletcher...

28. “Historical Facts and Spanish and Mexican Laws Requested by the Defendants to be Judicially Noticed by the Court,” submitted by the Cuyamaca Water Company.


35. City Resolution, #16675, March 13, 1914.

36. See, Strathman Dreams of a Big City, Chapter 2, for a detailed discussion of the relations between Fletcher and the city.


38. Wright, I, 51-52, & 55.


40. Wright, I, 43-A.


44. Hearings, 41.

45. Hearings, 27.

46. Wright, I, 46, 48.

47. Hearings, 25-27, 30, 36, 85, 41, & 56.


49. Wright II, 257.

50. Appeal. 209 Cal. 151.


52. Higgins, 4-5.
Indian Gaming in the Kumeyaay Nation
By Ethan Banegas

San Diego County has the largest concentration of Indian casinos in the nation. Gaming has allowed Indian tribes to pursue the policy of self-determination, which means that Indian tribal governments can conduct their own affairs. The process of winning the right to gamble took place over the course of nine years and involved three landmark cases: Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Butterfield (1979), Barona Group of the Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians v. Duffy (1982), and California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians (1987). This article examines the political climate that allowed the courts to favor Indian gaming. It also includes the shared history of the Barona, Sycuan, and Viejas casinos.

In the 1960s, Indians began to demand control over programs that affected their welfare. The federal government gradually allowed a higher degree of tribal sovereignty and self-determination. W. Dale Mason wrote:

Beginning with initiatives in the Kennedy administration, the 1960s brought about another dramatic change in Indian policy. By de facto ending termination and turning responsibility for federal programs over to the tribes, Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon set in motion a process that by the 1990s resulted in dynamic, thriving tribal governments.¹


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In the early 1980s, programs run by the Bureau of Indian Affairs were at risk of being cut when the Reagan administration decided to balance the budget.\textsuperscript{2} Sen. Thomas Slade Gorton (Republican-WA) remarked, “no one can or should expect to be exempt from the inevitable cuts which ensue from balancing the budget.”\textsuperscript{3} A “longtime tribal antagonist” and chairman of the Senate Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, Gorton successfully pushed to cut Indian programs.\textsuperscript{4} The pieces were in place for the state and federal governments to open the door for Indian gaming as a way to relieve tribal dependence on the federal government. Even a decade later in 1995, during the Clinton administration, the Senate refused to restore $200 million in cuts to the Bureau of Indian Affairs by a vote of 61 to 36.\textsuperscript{5} Pro-Indian supporters like Barbara Boxer (Democrat-CA), Edward Kennedy (Democrat-MA), and Majority Leader Tom Daschle (Democrat-SD) voted with the Republican majority.

With the 1980s cuts in federal funding, tribal governments looked for other ways of generating the revenue necessary to fund their programs. In 1975, the Seminole Tribe of Florida had established a high-stakes bingo operation that generated significant revenues for education, welfare, and economic development. Indian gaming was challenged when Broward County Sheriff Robert Butterfield, acting on behalf of the State of Florida, threatened to close the Seminole bingo hall because they offered prizes over $100. The Seminoles were granted a preliminary injunction by the district court and pursued a case against Florida, \textit{Seminole...}
Attorneys for the State of Florida defended Butterfield by arguing that the state had criminal jurisdiction over Indian tribes. In 1953, Congress had passed Public Law 83-280 that permitted certain states to transfer criminal jurisdiction from Indian country to the state government. The law applied to California, Nebraska, Minnesota, Oregon, and Wisconsin with the exception of three reservations: Red Lake Chippewa Reservation, Warm Springs Reservation, and Menominee Reservation.

Attorneys for the Seminole Tribe, however, successfully argued in 1979 that PL 83-280 only applied to criminal jurisdiction and not to gambling. The district and circuit courts agreed and ruled in favor of the Seminole Indian Tribe because “the playing of bingo halls and operation of bingo halls is not contrary to the public policy.” The court explained:

The district court held that Florida’s gambling laws were civil/regulatory not criminal/prohibitory. Therefore, notwithstanding the state’s assumption of criminal jurisdiction over Indians in Florida reservations under Public Law 83-280, the state limits on bingo did not apply to the Seminole games.

to the Seminole Reservation in Florida to evaluate their gambling operation. After his return, the Barona tribal council voted to open their own high stakes bingo with both tribal money and funds from Welch’s personal account. Barona was among the first tribes to have bingo games on a federally recognized tribal reservation.9 Like Florida, however, the State of California had laws forbidding high-stakes bingo. San Diego County Sheriff John Duffy, acting on behalf of the state, threatened to close the Barona bingo hall. Barona filed suit in district court in *Barona Group of the Capitan Grande Band of Mission Indians v. Duffy* and used the Seminole case as a precedent. Barona won in district court.10 The courts use the same language as the *Seminole* case to rule in favor of Barona, stating that California’s gaming policy was permissive/regulatory and bingo was beyond the Sheriff’s jurisdiction.11 A plaque at the Barona Museum pays homage to Barona’s victory; it reads, “In 1982 Barona won US Supreme Court ruling *Duffy v Barona*, allowing high-stakes Bingo.”12

In the wake of the *Barona* and *Seminole* cases, which decided in favor of Indian gaming, approximately 80 other tribes entered the gaming business.13 Although these court cases ruled that gaming was beyond the reach of the state’s jurisdiction to prosecute, “states continued to enforce their gambling regulations on reservations.”14 The final showdown took place in California almost a decade after *Seminole v. Butterfield* in the *California v. Cabazon* case (1987).15 Eighteen tribes and two Indian organizations battled twenty-five states in the Supreme Court over the role of state governments and Indian gaming.16 Like the *Barona* and *Seminole* cases, the state’s main argument rested on Public Law 83-280 giving the state jurisdiction over federally recognized tribes.

On February 25, 1987, the Supreme Court ruled 6 to 3 to reject California’s position. Using the same language as *Seminole* and *Barona*, the court found that Public Law 83-280 gave California the ability to regulate gaming but not to prohibit it. Congress had passed the law in an effort to combat lawlessness on reservations; it permitted states to intervene in tribal affairs only if criminal activity was taking place. *California v. Cabazon* settled the issue of states trying to forbid Indian gaming once and for all. Significantly, it was no coincidence there was a continuity of language used in all three court cases. During the author’s interview with Don Speer, long-time business advisor to the Barona Band of Mission Indians, he shared that the Cabazon attorneys used the *Barona* and *Seminole* cases as templates to win the case.17

Speer, working with the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians as an investor with a management contract for their Desert Oasis Casino at the time, emphasized that Barona was a massive influence on the steps taken to win the *Cabazon* case. These three court cases are inextricably linked. To summarize: in the beginning was the...
Seminole victory, which led Joe Welch (Barona’s Chairman) to visit the Seminoles and open a high-stakes bingo operation on Barona. Thereafter, Sheriff Duffy’s threat brought about Barona’s case and eventual victory, using the argument from prosecuting attorneys representing the Seminoles. After Barona’s victory, Cabazon had the final showdown in the Supreme Court and won by replicating Barona’s and Seminole’s arguments.

Barona Bingo Cardroom and Casino

Under Chairman Welch, Barona’s high-stakes bingo continued in an unassuming gymnasium at the center of the reservation and generated money. Tribal sovereignty gave Barona’s bingo a competitive advantage over off-reservation games because the state could not limit hours and jackpots.

In 1983, the Sycuan tribe, located eleven miles from Barona, followed suit and opened up a bingo hall. Sycuan’s high-stakes bingo enjoyed the same competitive advantage as Barona, and it was located much closer to large population centers in San Diego. It was not long before Sycuan took most of Barona’s business, leaving their neighboring tribe in a vulnerable situation. Barona’s nascent gaming business closed four times due to both mismanagement and Sycuan’s proximity to San Diego.

Clifford LaChappa, who succeeded Joe Welch as tribal chairman of Barona, inherited a gaming business in dire straits. After closing four times, Barona’s high-stakes bingo was hardly producing any income for tribal members. Chairman LaChappa was working for the San Diego Gas and Electric Company, and when
he heard about a man named Don Speer who was recognized in the gaming industry for successfully turning around the bankrupt gaming business on the Cabazon reservation near Palm Springs, California, he reached out to him. After working with the Cabazon tribe for nearly six years, he was reluctant to come to the Barona reservation because it had a bad track record and an extremely remote location. Chairman LaChappa talked him into visiting the reservation and the rest is history. Speer was drawn to the people of Barona. On a handshake deal, he committed to not only investing his own money to help Barona turn its struggling business around but had a clear vision and determination to turn it into a financial success that would rival casinos on the Las Vegas strip. He took a gamble on Barona’s high-stakes bingo and built a new cardroom investing his own money in the operation.19

Speer and the people of Barona soon turned their gaming operation around. Eventually the tribe accumulated enough money to expand into a bona fide casino, the Big Top Barona Casino, that opened in 1994. Building this casino was not without risk because Barona did not yet have a state compact. Authorities could have closed the operation if a compact between the tribe and state was not agreed upon. Fortunately, the Las Vegas-style casino became an instant success. It was housed in a 39,000 square-foot tent, had 1,000 slot machines, and consisted of a vintage Barnum and Bailey circus theme. With the construction of the Barona Big Top, Barona’s gaming operation went from the third most successful casino in San Diego to the first.

In anticipation of a Barona compact with the State of California, Speer and the people of Barona began plans in 1998 with world-renowned Las Vegas architect Joel Bergman to build a new $225 million resort casino. Bergman had designed the Golden Nugget (Atlantic City), the MGM Resort & Casino (Las Vegas), the Mirage (Las Vegas), Caesar’s Palace (Las Vegas), The Paris Casino and Resort (Las Vegas), and numerous other projects. Significantly, Barona’s first gaming compact with the state was signed on October 8, 1999, during the preliminary stages of the new resort and casino.20 After four years of planning and construction, Barona’s new casino was completed on December 31, 2002. There is a detailed description of Barona’s resort and casino on their website:

About Barona Resort & Casino: Named Best Casino and “Loosest Slots” for six consecutive years in the San Diego’s Best Union-Tribune Readers Poll, Barona Resort & Casino is the ultimate gaming entertainment destination featuring 2,000 slot and video poker machines and over 90 table games. The AAA Four Diamond rated property features 400 spacious guest rooms and suites with beautiful...
views of Barona Valley, award-winning dining, the AmBience Day Spa, a full-service events center and the 18-hole championship Barona Creek Golf Club, which was rated the 4th Best Resort Course in California by *Golfweek* Magazine.

**Sycuan Aims for Economic Diversity**

Barona and Sycuan share a common history in Indian gaming. Among the most noteworthy correlations are bingo history and a pioneering tribal chair. In 1972, Anna Prieto Sandoval won the tribal chair of the Sycuan Band of the Kumeyaay Nation. There were approximately eighty tribal members at the time and “none had a steady job.”

Life on the reservation was full of extreme hardships and Sandoval walked ten miles one day to retrieve milk for her children. News travels fast among reservations in San Diego County due to ancient kinship ties, and Sandoval heard about Barona’s successful high-stakes bingo operation eleven miles away. In 1983, Chairwoman Sandoval was approached by Pan American International (PAI), a management company, to open a high-stakes bingo operation on Sycuan. This was the same management company that managed Seminole bingo in Florida.

A year after Chairman Edward “Joe” Welch opened a bingo hall in Barona’s recreation center, Sandoval pioneered Sycuan’s high-stakes bingo. Like Welch, Sandoval used her own personal assets to start a gambling operation. PAI’s

*Sycuan Casino, 2017. Photo by Ethan Banegas.*
The proposition had created strong opposition among a faction of Sycuan’s tribal members who feared that traffic jams and strangers would change their quiet reservation life. Sandoval, however, offered a remote site on the outskirts of the reservation (she owned half the title) to satisfy the tribal opposition. The Sycuan Bingo Palace, as it was called, irked those who had doubted Sandoval, particularly after her business venture became profitable.23

Sycuan had a competitive advantage over Barona because it was located closer to large population centers in San Diego and just ten miles from the city of El Cajon. The tribe’s early success allowed them to part ways with PAI management in 1987 and to manage the bingo game themselves. Profits eventually allowed them to pay for an expansion that was completed in 1990. The new bingo hall consisted of a 68,000 square-foot structure and included a 1,500-seat bingo parlor, 35 poker tables, and 20 off-track betting seats. Chairwoman Sandoval was the leader of Sycuan for twenty years (1972 to 1992) and brought Sycuan’s eighty tribal members out of abject poverty. By the early 1990s unemployment disappeared.24

In 2002 Sycuan hired Steve Penhall to be the general manager of their casino. He previously worked at the Sandia Casino in Albuquerque, New Mexico, for three years, and at the Ute Mountain Casino in Durango, Colorado, for seven years.25 Penhall resigned in 2008 and Sycuan returned to managing their own casino for a second time. Hank Murphy, an elder tribal member of Sycuan, said that he could not believe so many Indian casinos spent money on management
companies. With great pride, Murphy explained that the people of Sycuan and the tribal council “run our own affairs.”

Don Speer mentioned that management companies are often important for financial investment and gaming expertise to open an Indian casino. For example, he stated that San Diego’s newest casino on the Jamul Reservation “probably would not have gotten off the ground without a management company.” He also believed the same was true for Harrah’s Rincon Casino in San Diego County, which is operated by the largest management company in the world. Notably, Barona, Viejas, and Sycuan all entered the casino industry with management companies. However, after their casinos became profitable, they no longer thought it was necessary to hire management companies.

There are costs and benefits to Indians managing their own casinos. Management companies are extremely expensive and their employees make all the daily decisions for the casinos. As a result, tribal members know very little about their own business and often feel worlds apart due to a lack of involvement. On the other hand, many Indians lack experience in the casino industry. In that business, decisions that seem counter-intuitive are often the right ones. Sometimes it helps to have a management company with decades of experience in the casino industry. The question of whether to self-manage or hire a management company remains a debate that is extremely important for gaming tribes and a topic that deserves more study.

Daniel Tucker was the tribal chair of Sycuan for most of the development of Class III Vegas-style gaming. He served as tribal chairman for fourteen years (1993-1996 and 2003-2014). Before his tenure, El Cajon’s major golf course, Singing Hills, had been bought by Sycuan in 2001 to attract customers to play at the casino. Singing Hills was renamed the Sycuan Golf Resort and includes fifty-four holes, two restaurants, a swimming pool, one-hundred-twenty rooms and suites, and shuttle service to the casino, located three miles away.

In 2011, Sycuan Casino spent twenty-seven million dollars to renovate their casino “reminiscent of a Sultan’s palace.” They gutted “the entire casino, section by section,” added a world class sports bar, and expanded the buffet. The total square footage is 305,000, which is equivalent to Viejas’ floor plan. Currently, the Sycuan casino has a total of five restaurants and “the Bingo Palace on the second floor…can easily be said to be the most elegant bingo in San Diego.”

Viejas—A Casino plus a Factory Outlet

In 1977, before the Seminoles opened their high-stakes bingo hall, Viejas opened a bingo room in their Ma Tar Awa RV Park. This event, however, is
insignificant to the genesis of Indian gaming because it did not challenge the state with high-stakes jackpots and extended hours of operation, as Barona did six years later.

Following the three cases that made Indian gaming legal in United States, the people of Viejas voted to open a 100,000 square-foot casino in 1991. Eight years later, in 1999, they expanded to a 300,000 square-foot casino. This new expansion coincided with the signing of a state compact with then-Governor Gray Davis of California.

September 10, 1999 is considered the “economic Independence Day of California Indians” because 58 state compacts, including Sycuan and Viejas, were signed by tribal leaders and Governor Davis. Three more compacts were signed, including Barona’s compact, on October 8, 1999. Gaming compacts limited Indian casinos to 2,000 slot machines; Viejas, Barona, and Sycuan maxed out their allotted quota at the turn of the twenty-first century. On June 14, 2000, Viejas was the first casino to have Las Vegas-style (coin operated) slot machines on a reservation.

On March 21, 2013, Viejas Casino became the Viejas Casino and Resort after a $36 million dollar expansion added a hotel. Tribal chairman Anthony Pico said Viejas originally planned for a six-hundred room hotel in 2007, but after the economic downturn, the hotel was reduced to approximately 80 percent less square footage. The Viejas hotel currently has a total of 128 rooms, which include ninety-nine deluxe and twenty-nine luxury suites. Like Barona and Sycuan, the
people of Viejas manage their hotel without a management company.34 To make way for the new hotel, the old bingo hall was razed and a new four-hundred-seat bingo hall was constructed across the street from the casino in the Viejas Outlet shopping center.35 Currently, the Viejas Casino has six restaurants, a night club called the “Dream Catcher,” an RV park, and a sixty-store retail outlet mall. Although the Viejas Outlet Center has struggled in recent years, it grossed twenty million dollars in 2013 according to tax yields.36 In addition, the mall has managed to attract and sustain several designer brands such as Tommy Hilfiger, Polo Ralph Lauren, Levi’s Outlet, Guess Factory Store, Gap Outlet, Eddie Bauer, Coach, Sunglass Hut, Nike Clearance Store, and eight eateries.37

Comparing Three Native Nations

In the early history of the Kumeyaay Nation, Barona and Viejas shared a common history on the Capitan Grande Reservation. This was mostly a mutual political relationship because the kinship ties between Los Conejos and the Barona Band were tenuous. This political relationship became most evident during the relocation of 1932. Later, Barona and Sycuan enjoyed a common gaming history. Both tribes pioneered high-stakes bingo in San Diego County with trailblazing chairs, Edward “Joe” Welch and Anne Prieto Sandoval. Intense competition between Sycuan and Barona ensued in the burgeoning high-stakes bingo business,
but in the end there were no losers. As Don Speer said, “Gambling begets more gambling.” Sycuan still leads the Kumeyaay Nation in bingo, Viejas opened a new bingo hall in 2013, and Barona is out of the bingo business altogether, but is recognized as the leading gaming resort destination in the San Diego market.

Juxtaposing economic diversity among Barona, Viejas, and Sycuan is significant. Barona is the least diversified and possesses almost no other form of income outside of gaming. Viejas owns an outlet shopping mall that grossed approximately $20 million in 2013. Sycuan owns the U.S. Grant Hotel which it purchased in 2003 for $45 million (with an additional $10 million set aside for renovations). Its namesake President Ulysses S. Grant created Sycuan via executive order in 1875, irony which is not lost on Sycuan’s tribal members. In 2007, Chairman Danny Tucker was honored inside the Grant Hotel by the San Diego History Center at the History Makers Gala with the George W. Marston Award for civic leadership. According to The Journal of San Diego History, “to date, the casino has been the Band’s most noteworthy economic success.” Such a bold statement deserves qualification.

If Barona, Viejas, and Sycuan were judged simply by economic output, Barona is the most successful casino by a large margin. Strictly from a gaming perspective, the Barona Valley Resort and Casino grosses more than Sycuan and Viejas combined and is the envy of the casino industry. If we measure Sycuan, Viejas, and Barona on economic diversity, then Sycuan is the clear winner. So far, Barona’s attempts at economic diversity have been nominal, and their economic development committee, SIGNATUS, has only invested in stocks, bonds, and

mutual funds. SIGNATUS was created approximately a decade ago and consists of seven board members (all tribal). The people of Barona recently approved a $40 million casino expansion in 2016.

In contrast to Barona, the people of Viejas have attempted other business ventures outside of gaming. The Viejas Factory Outlet Center is 255,000 square feet and includes allotments for 60 stores. Currently, San Diego’s newest outlet center is operating 30 stores and grossing $20 million.

After building their casino, Sycuan established the Sycuan Tribal Development Corporation to diversify their economic portfolio. They have made several noteworthy acquisitions. Their first major purchase was in 2001, with the Singing Hills Golf Course. In 2003, the U.S. Grant Hotel was purchased followed by the procurement of Ringside Promotions (boxing promotions). In addition, in 2003 the Sycuan Tribal Development Corporation proposed a twenty-five-million-dollar hotel in National City and launched a mutual fund to invest in large and medium American stocks. The drastic and subtle differences among these three tribes make for an intriguing case study indeed. One can only speculate about their future competition.
NOTES


2. Ibid., 26.


14. Ibid.


22. “Anna Prieto Sandoval, 76; Sycuan Leader was a Pioneer in Indian Gaming,” Los Angeles Times, November 1, 2011.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. David J. Valley and Diana Lindsay, Jackpot Trail: Indian Gaming in Southern California (San Diego, Sunbelt Publications, 2003), 149.


29. Valley and Lindsay, Jackpot Trail, 150.
30. Ibid., 155.
32. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
38. Speer, interview by Banegas.
41. Don Speer, interview by Ethan Banegas, Barona Resort and Casino, December 11, 2016.

Barona Tribal Museum and Cultural Center. Photo courtesy Barona Tribal Museum.
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BOOK REVIEWS


Reviewed by Robert A. Kittle, author and independent historian.

San Diego’s unique history as the birthplace of European civilization on the West Coast of North America is often overlooked, even by those who call San Diego home. Iris Engstrand’s newly updated volume, San Diego: California’s Cornerstone, admirably chronicles this neglected story from the migration of prehistoric Native Americans around 8,000 BC to the present day. To read this concise account is to gain a much better appreciation of San Diego’s place in the broader American narrative. At the same time the new edition contains a significant correction to a long-standing error about the Spanish discovery of the area.

Longtime professor of history at the University of San Diego, Engstrand is an accomplished historian, author of twenty-five books, and recipient of many honors, including the prestigious Order of Isabel la Católica, awarded by King Juan Carlos for outstanding contributions to the history of Spain in the Americas. Thus she is in an exceptional position to rectify a conspicuous error in the historical record--namely, the nationality of navigator Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the first European to explore the California coast. His arrival aboard the 200-ton galleon San Salvador in San Diego Bay on September 28, 1542, marked the beginning of Spain’s sporadic occupation of the Pacific slope.

For centuries Portugal has claimed Cabrillo as a national hero, even though he sailed under the Spanish flag on his extensive voyages of discovery. San Diego’s proud Portuguese community has long celebrated Cabrillo as one of its own, with annual festivals and reenactments of his landing near Ballast Point. The noble, 14-foot white stone statue of the explorer at the Cabrillo National Monument in Point Loma was sculpted by Portuguese artist João Charters de Almeida e Silva under Lisbon’s authorization. When the image was dedicated in 1988, the Portuguese ambassador to the United States was in attendance. All of this perpetuated the false claim that Cabrillo was born in Portugal.

Never mind that many respected historians, including Engstrand, were skeptical. No one ever was able to say exactly where in Portugal the heroic conquistador was born, and several towns claimed to be his birthplace. The awkward fact was that, throughout his life, Cabrillo always signed his name the Spanish way, never the Portuguese version of João Rodrigues Cabrilho. He also was
married to a Spanish woman, Beatriz Sánchez de Ortega, who bore him two sons.

The myth finally was exposed in 2015 when a Canadian researcher, Wendy Kramer, uncovered contemporary documents in the Archivo General de Indias, the repository of Spanish records of the New World in Seville. While researching an unrelated matter, Kramer found a testament given by one Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo in a 1532 lawsuit. He declared under oath that he was born in what is now known as Palma del Río, a quaint town in the province of Córdoba, Spain. To her credit, Engstrand has faced this fact squarely in her revised history of San Diego, even though the local Portuguese community would like to maintain its long-standing position.

Under Engstrand’s diligent research, many other colorful episodes in San Diego’s history spring to life. They include the bloody nighttime assault by 600 Kumeyaay warriors on the San Diego Mission on November 5, 1775. The attack often is neglected today because it contradicts the misleading notion of harmonious mission life. But Franciscan Father Luís Jayme was brutally bludgeoned and stabbed to death by the Indians, and two other Spaniards died. A number of Kumeyaay were killed as well.

The reader also will learn how anarchist Emma Goldman was run out of town by vigilantes in 1912 after the City Council passed an unconstitutional ban on street-corner speeches. This brought an abrupt end to the local organizing activities of the revolutionary Industrial Workers of the World, the Wobblies. Then there is the unforgettable tale of Charles Mallory Hatfield, who in 1915 was hired by the city after he promised to make rain and end a drought. By sheer coincidence, a winter deluge of historic proportions washed out roads and bridges and caused the collapse of the Lower Otay Dam. Hatfield never collected his $10,000 fee because the city attorney claimed the rainmaker was liable for the flood damages.

In her account of the modern era, the author is charitable to San Diego’s elected leaders. The alleged bribery of three City Council members by a strip-club operator, Mayor Dick Murphy’s resignation amid the crushing pension debt of city workers, and Mayor Bob Filner’s resignation in disgrace over his sexual abuses are glossed over. In fact, Engstrand’s view of San Diego remains downright boosterish throughout most of her volume, including her parting observation that the region thrives on “a solid basis in economic and educational progress, a viable and growing tourist industry, and a people proud of their cultural and intellectual achievements.” In San Diego: California’s Cornerstone, Engstrand introduces fresh scholarship while continuing to illuminate local history and arguing for the significance of San Diego in both California and United States history. Despite what some might view as a more sympathetic take on recent political history, the book remains a valuable reference for local and national historians alike.

Reviewed by Daniel S. Elkin, Ph.D. Candidate in History, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville.

Fred B. Glass’s timely history of the California labor movement is an ambitious attempt to synthesize the long tradition of workers’ struggles in the Golden State. Beginning with the struggle of indigenous laborers against the mission system and stretching forward to the role of unions in California’s most recent fights on state ballot initiatives, Glass covers a lot of ground. Some of these topics are well-traversed by scholarship but nowhere before have these narratives been stitched together to present a larger theme: the ongoing struggle of American workers amid ever-changing circumstances. While not always seamless, From Mission to Microchip accomplishes an important feat: it speaks to the uniqueness of the California experience.

More than any other state, California at any given moment is consistently a microcosm of larger national struggles. Michigan’s history can speak to the challenges of industrial unionism, and Texas to the plight of the Latino field hand, and Massachusetts to the struggling worker in a service-based economy. But California can speak to all three at once, given the state’s expansive and diverse economy. In this way Glass’s work is instructive for labor historians and activists alike.

Glass begins by informing readers that he will be taking them into a submerged history where the “lives of and activities of working people have been neglected in the shadows cast by ‘great men’…whose actions in the glare of media attention seem to bestow on them a sense of inevitability and destiny” (p. 7). In contrast, nothing seems destined for the workers that leap from Glass’s pages. Instead their story is one of struggle and suffering and only occasional success.

Yet, when California workers were successful in their fights against capital it tended to foreshadow wider success on the national stage. This was particularly true during the “great upheaval” of the New Deal period. In May 1934 the San Francisco Longshoreman, tired of waiting out tedious negotiations mediated by the Roosevelt administration, called for a general strike. Over 40,000 maritime workers participated, shutting down the Port of San Francisco. These actions were not without sacrifice: the responses were violent and many workers were killed and hundreds injured, but it planted the seed of industrial unionism and cemented “the power of instantaneous rank and file action” (p. 249). At the national
level, such a display of solidarity and militancy powered the rise of the more radical Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), a coalition of unions which organized and advocated for a more robust welfare state.

While one of the better-known episodes in the book, the San Francisco General Strike proves the point of many of the narratives in Glass’s work: California nurtured the flame of working class struggle throughout its existence. San Diego is not absent from this story. The Free Speech struggle of 1912 saw the organization of thousands of laborers and activists in the working-class Stingaree district to oppose city ordinances against soap-box orations. This threat to free speech brought together the highly radical Industrial Workers of the World, the moderate American Federation of Labor, and moderate liberal reformers. Worthy of note is that the movement also threatened to initiate the first collaboration between workers across international boundaries in North America: many Mexican IWW members participated in the Free Speech Movement. Threatened by the prospect of working-class solidarity, the booster-clique leadership of San Diego, headed by sugar magnate John D. Spreckels, saw to the violent repression of the movement.

From Mission to Microchip proves timely mainly because its final chapters present themselves as a how-to guide for workers seeking to organize against capital in the modern period. At a time when labor and collective rights are in retreat across the nation, California serves as a counter-example. Democrats have moved away from meaningful relationships with organized labor at the national level, but in California, workers refused to be relegated to the sidelines and in the 2012 ballot initiatives defeated not only Republican efforts but also the efforts of neoliberal Democrats. This, combined with the success of voter mobilization efforts by unions in Nevada in 2016, proves Glass’s larger point that California both nurtures and expands the tradition of multiracial worker-led democracy. Though the struggles ahead are many, Glass leaves readers predisposed to this cause with an optimistic view of the future.

On the whole, Glass offers an impressive narrative that not only exemplifies stories of workers’ struggles but also provides an interesting timeline of capitalism’s changing nature over time (from industrialism to post-industrialism). This book was written for those sympathetic towards the struggle of labor but it remains valuable and accessible to general readers as well as educators seeking to expand their coverage of California history. For professional labor historians and scholars of the West, From Mission to Microchip proves to be a powerful synthesis that deserves a place on the bookshelf.

Reviewed by David Miller, Ph.D., Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of History, University of San Diego.

Chances are if you live in the western United States you have heard of, if not used, WAXIE products. Less well known may be the company’s history and local connection to San Diego, the town where Morris and Harry Wax created the nation’s largest family-owned janitorial supply company. And what better way to celebrate the company’s 70th anniversary than to retell the WAXIE story through the narrative of the people who made it happen? This story unfolds, the cover informs us, “as told by the owners, managers, employees, vendors, customers, and friends of WAXIE to writer Donald H. Harrison.” Harrison, a local San Diego journalist and historian, captures the WAXIE story in a highly readable 458-page showpiece. He and the WAXIE company have assembled a visually impressive and historically interesting collection of colorful photos, vignettes, and lively personal accounts that tell the inspirational narrative of American family and business success. The book consists of four parts, each highlighting a unique aspect of the WAXIE story while revealing much about San Diego’s history.

Part One introduces the reader to the Wax family, illuminating both their personal histories and the broader histories of the United States and San Diego. The saga begins with Itzig Wachs (Isaac Wax), who immigrated to Boston, via Liverpool, England, from his native Ukraine in 1904. He came at a time when many Jews fleeing war and pogroms in eastern Europe filled American cities. Circumstances meant he came alone, but intending to stay, he sent for his wife Sadie once settled. In the tried and true mold of chain migration the couple made their way to a cousin’s home in Salt Lake City in 1914 where Isaac scratched out a living as a peddler and merchant. Upon Isaac’s death in 1962 Sadie moved to San Diego to be with her two sons, and died four years later. Each successive chapter in Part One recounts the histories of Isaac and Sadie’s two sons, Harry and Morris, and grandsons Charles and David. Their lives tell the story not just of WAXIE, but of four men growing up in San Diego among the broader currents of American history. Both sons, for example, served in the Second World War, Morris in the Army and Harry in the Navy Seabees. It was enlistment in the Navy that first brought Harry to San Diego and, not surprisingly, in later years WAXIE has become a significant booster for the military in town.

In Parts Two and Three, Harrison traces the history of the company from its San
Diego beginnings in 1945 to the 70th Anniversary and spotlights the personalities who brought development and growth to WAXIE’s regional branches. Harry Wax purchased San Diego Janitor & Chemical in 1945, leasing 2,000 square feet at 10th and B for $2,500. Morris, recipient of a Bronze Star while serving in Europe under General George Patton, soon joined his brother. Skeptical at first about the potential for a middling janitorial supply company, he nonetheless threw in his lot with a cash contribution and set to work with his brother. Harrison shows how since that time WAXIE has grown to its present status of the nation’s largest family-owned janitorial supply company. This growth of course includes many regional branches and Harrison highlights eight. Salt Lake City is one example. The dominant janitorial/sanitation supply company in the region belonged to another Jewish family, the Lovingers. WAXIE acquired Lovinger Janitorial Supply in 1982 when the latter encountered financial difficulty. Although this move was risky, as it was WAXIE’s first non-contiguous regional branch expansion, the company’s talented employees were able to make it a success. It is a fitting closure to Isaac’s story.

Part Four, “Past and Future”, looks back at WAXIE through the years with an eye toward the future. This includes a useful eleven-page annotated timeline of events spanning 100 years from Harry Wax’s birth in 1906 to 2015. Need to know what WAXIE was about in, say, 1994? A quick flip of the page and you will learn that they installed voice mail and purchased land in Kearny Mesa for future expansion of San Diego headquarters. Looking ahead, the final two chapters examine recent corporate developments, growth strategies, and special events, including the 70th Anniversary sales meeting aboard USS Midway. With over 20 pages of color photographs celebrating WAXIE’s employees, there is plenty here for everyone to feel good about.

The WAXIE story is one worth knowing and Harrison, along with the members of the WAXIE company, retell it in a visually pleasing, insightful, and entertaining way.
All the Wild That Remains: Edward Abbey, Wallace Stegner, and the American West.

Reviewed by Theodore A. Strathman, Lecturer, Department of History, California State University San Marcos.

At first glance Wallace Stegner and Edward Abbey seem polar opposites: the former a staid and stable literary giant who settled in at Stanford University in 1945 and stayed there until his retirement in 1971; the latter a peripatetic, anarchistic gadfly, a part-time park ranger who gained a cult following through writing that could be brash, juvenile, and chauvinistic yet profoundly beautiful. Stegner won a Pulitzer Prize, had a reputation as a workaholic, and was a faithful husband to his wife of sixty years. Abbey’s literary career was slow to take off, his work was often dismissed by “serious” critics, and he was a notorious womanizer who married five times. What unites the two, according to David Gessner’s fine book, is their clear-eyed, almost prophetic vision of the American West. All the Wild That Remains combines biography with travel writing to argue that in an age of climate change and continuing environmental degradation, Stegner and Abbey continue to hold relevance in their warnings about the fragility of the West.

Gessner meditates on the legacy of the two writers by leading the reader through a series of encounters with people and places connected to them. At the same time, Gessner, now a resident of North Carolina, returns to those locations that shaped his understanding of the West. It is in these passages that Gessner’s skill as a nature writer is evident. But it is also here that his argument about Stegner and Abbey is driven home: his own travels show him a region struggling with the effects of drought, wildfires, and the persistence of extractive industries. The two authors, Gessner maintains, would hardly be surprised by the environmental crises confronting the West. Stegner’s novels and non-fiction frequently challenged long-standing myths of the West as a place of individualism where personal fortune was just over the next hill, in the next land rush, or in the next oil boom. Building on a theme from his friend and mentor Bernard De Voto, Stegner described a region whose aridity and hostile landscapes destroyed many “boomers” (like Stegner’s own father) but whose environments could be destroyed in turn by those eager to exploit its resources. What the West demanded, Stegner maintained, was a respect for the land itself, a recognition of its limits, and human communities based on cooperation rather than individualism. Abbey, meanwhile, railed against those who saw in the West only saleable commodities. The real value of the West was its beauty, its wildness, and the opportunity it afforded for
freedom: wilderness, Abbey insisted, was an essential antidote for civilization, a place where the individual could escape the artifices of culture and the state.

Gessner makes no effort to disguise his admiration for the two writers, but his book successfully avoids hero-worship. This is especially the case with Abbey, whose desire to provoke has left a somewhat difficult legacy, especially for those on the political left. His views on women were hardly enlightened, he favored the right to bear arms, and he defended immigration control in terms that exploited racial stereotypes pertaining to Mexicans. Gessner grapples with the question of how to define the politics of each of these writers, and at the heart of this discussion is a remark from the writer Terry Tempest Williams, who claimed that Abbey, the bearded, bushy-haired nonconformist, was the conservative, while the buttoned-down Stegner was the radical. Gessner does not quite seem to find a satisfactory answer to this riddle, but this is more because of the elusiveness of the terms themselves than because of any failure on Gessner’s part. Still, though, students of history may wish for more exploration of the terrain of mid-century conservatism, liberalism, and radicalism. After all, the Sierra Club and many labor organizations, groups usually associated with post-World War II liberalism, favored immigration restriction in the decades before the 1980s.

All the Wild That Remains will appeal to those interested in the literature of the West, but it should be read as well by anyone who cares about the environment of the region. It is rich in anecdotes and insights. A particularly interesting example of the latter is Gessner’s discussion of the post-9/11 fate of monkeywrenching. Much of Abbey’s popularity comes from The Monkey Wrench Gang, his rollicking novel of four eco-saboteurs who disrupt the engines of development and fantasize about blowing up Glen Canyon Dam. As Gessner points out, such actions may have seemed romantic and heroic when the novel was published in 1975, but now they are viewed (especially by federal authorities) as domestic terrorism. Stegner’s brand of environmental advocacy, as reflected in his “Wilderness Letter,” for example, is probably more practical, Gessner asserts. But there is still a place for Abbey. Gessner argues that his symbolic resistance, his refusal to conform, and his defense of personal freedom (even if what Abbey did with that freedom may rub some the wrong way) were perhaps never more appropriate and necessary than in our own age of government surveillance and wilderness under siege.
BOOK NOTES

Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco. By Clare Sears. Durham: Duke University Press, 2015. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. x + 202 pp. $79.95 cloth, $22.95 paper. Clare Sears’s Arresting Dress examines how cross-dressing laws in San Francisco (the earliest of which the Board of Supervisors passed during the Civil War) not only punished “transgressive” behavior but helped create norms pertaining to gender.

Grounds for Dreaming: Mexican Americans, Mexican Immigrants, and the California Farmworker Movement. By Lori A. Flores. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. 304 pp. $45 cloth. The Salinas Valley is linked most famously to the struggle for farmworkers’ rights as a result of the tragic 1963 bus accident that cost the lives of fifty eight farmworkers and contributed to the termination of the Bracero Program. This monograph explores the role of the valley in the farmworker movement and how ethnic Mexicans of varying nationality and residency status – from the U.S.-born to guest workers to undocumented laborers – organized in both the Bracero Era and afterwards.


Juan Bautista de Anza: The King’s Governor in New Mexico. By Carlos R. Herrera. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. xii + 308 pp. $29.95 cloth. While students of California history are familiar with Anza’s overland expedition from Mexico to San Francisco, less well-known is his time as governor of New Mexico. This biography of Anza covers the entire span of his life, from his childhood in Sonora to his ten-year service in New Mexico during which much of his effort was concentrated on defending the colony from hostile Indians and enacting a series of administrative reforms.

New Deal program that aimed to provide work relief for unemployed musicians. Gough argues that the program’s catering to local audiences’ tastes in the West helped increased appreciation for a variety of musical forms, from Hispanic and African American traditions to folk music often tinged with Popular Front politics.

*Woody Guthrie: L.A. 1937 to 1941.* Edited by Darryl Holter and William Deverell. Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2015. Illustrations. 208 pp. $40 cloth. The outgrowth of a 2012 conference celebrating the centennial of Guthrie’s birth, this volume includes twelve essays about the singer-songwriter. In addition, the book contains song lyrics and cartoons written by Guthrie himself. These materials tell the story not only of Guthrie’s rising fame in Depression-era California but also of the radicalizing effect of his time in Los Angeles, as he met figures from the political left and developed a songwriting voice that championed the marginalized and underprivileged.
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