

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Places Names Traced to Grants

There were 666 Spanish and Mexican private land grants in what is now the State of California. Many of California's Indian names were preserved in the titles of these grants, according to a valuable little book published by the University of California Press and bearing the title 1,000 California Place Names. The book, paper bound, contains the story behind the naming of the important mountains, counties, rivers, cities, lakes, capes and bays in California. Erwin G. Gudde is the author.

The very first listing in the book is Abalone, ab-a-loh-nee. The name of a large California mollusk, valuable for its meat and its shells, is given to a number of points, rocks and coves along the coast.

The first name listed applying to Monterey County is Aromas. The name is derived from the name of the land grant Aromitas y Agua Caliente (little odors and warm water). The aromas or aromitas referred apparently to the odors of sulphur water.

Asilomar a-see-lo-mar. The artificial name, coined from the Spanish asilo (refuge) and mar (sea) was given by the national board of the YWCA in 1913.

Big Sur River soor. From the Spanish Rio Grande del Sur (Big river of the South of Monterey)

California California. Like El Dorado, Quivira, and the Seven Cities of Cibola, was the name of one of the utopias which originated in the imagination of the people after the discovery of America had revived the age-old dream of a paradise on earth. The mythical realm was apparently created by the Spanish writer Montalvo in the romance Las Sergas de Esplandian (the exploits of Esplandian) and endowed with beautiful black Amazons, gold and pearls. The name is a fanciful creation; none of the many explanations of the meaning of California can be substantiated. Golfo de la California and a Cabo California appear on the maps of 1562. In 1569 the name was applied to the peninsula of what is now Lower California; on later maps it was often extended to include the entire Pacific Coast. From 1769 to 1846 the area which is approximately included in the present state was termed Alta (upper) and Nueva (new), California.

Carmel is included in the book. It is pronounced Karmel. The river was discovered by Vizcaino, January 3, 1603, and called Rio del Carmelo, probably because three friars of the Carmelite order were with the expedition. The bay was also named in Spanish times; Mt. Carmel was named by the Coast Survey in 1856; the modern Carmel-by-the-Sea was so called to distinguish it from Carmel Valley which was some 10 miles inland. The Spanish spelling was used until the 1860's.

Chalone was named for an Indian tribe which lived east of Soledad Mission. The name is mentioned in 1816, a Cierro Chalon is on the map of the San Lorenzo land grant.

Chaparral shap-a-ral. The original Spanish word, a thick growth of scrub oak. In California the name applies to dense, sometimes impenetrable, thickets of shrubs covering the hillsides, and appears in many geographical terms.

Chupines Creek choo-pee-nes. A place named Chupines was recorded in 1828 and an Arroyo de los Chopines in 1834. Probably from the Mexican chopo (black cottonwood) a native tree of the region.

Del Monte del mon-tee. The name, meaning "of the grove," was first applied to the hotel in 1886, suggested probably the beautiful grove of trees near by.

Gabilan Range The mountain named for the Spanish Gabilan (sparrow hawk) and has been known by this name since 1828. Gabilan Peak is popularly known as Fremont Peak because Fremont here defied the Mexicans by raising the American flag in 1846.

Golden Gate named by Fremont in 1846 in analogy to the Golden Horn in Europe. He chose the name because he foresaw the day when riches of the Orient would flow through the gate, but he could not foresee that the discovery of gold in a few years would give the name new significance.

Gonzales The railroad station was named in 1873 for Teodoro Gonzales because it was built on his extensive grant.

Jolon ho-lohn. The place, probably a Salinan Indian rancheria, was recorded in the early 1800's. The name was applied to the post office about 1860.

King City The station was named by the Southern Pacific in 1886, for C.H. King, owner of the Rancho San Lorenzo.

Mesa (May-sa) The Spanish word for a flat-topped hill is generally used in the American Southwest but it has not replaced the corresponding English word “table-hill.” There are more than 20 mesas in the state, together with a number of towns so named.

Monterey The bay named in 1602 by Vizcaino, in honor of the Count of Monterey, then viceroy of New Spain. The town developed around the Presidio established by Portola in 1770, the first Spanish military establishment in California. The county was created and named in 1850.