

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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Indian Place Names

When the Spaniards came to California, they changed many of the native villages into Spanish pueblos, and with the new settlers came a new name. Yang-na was what the San Gabriel Indians called their tribal village on the site that the Spanish christened Los Angeles.

Fortunately, someone who settled in Ojai Valley did ask the Chumash Indians why it was so called. Now people who live in the Ojai can say that they live in "Moon Valley."

American pioneers who settled in the Indian village of Woilo, changed the name to Bakersfield. Carpinteria was once called Kolok by the Indians who lived on the coast.

Sometimes the old name given to a tribal village is still used, but the early spelling, or the accent has been altered. Olema was the village of Olemaloke. The Tehachapi Mountains were first called Tehichpiu by the Indians who lived at their foot.

Many of the Indian villages disappeared entirely. Traces of the tribal villages have been found on the Channel Islands off the coast of southern California. When the natives were transferred to the mainland by the Spaniards, their villages were deserted. However, some of the Indian names of the site are still known.

Even if the names themselves can be found, many of the Indian words have lost their meaning. For instance, the Siskiyou Mountains were called that by the northern tribes, but no one knows why.

This much has been found out, the Indians liked to call their villages and landmarks by descriptive names. Others who lived in California have preferred naming the places after people or saints. Where Americans might name a beautiful park or mountain after a general or an explorer, the Indians liked to tell something about the place itself in the name. Grizzly bears in the great National Park of Yosemite caught the Indians' fancy. That is why the valley of Yosemite, or "grizzly bear," is so named.

The Pomo Indians called one of the landmarks Harpoon Point, or Napa. The word has remained in that section of California. Napa has been the name of an Indian

village or Spanish rancho, an American city, and a California county.

Many Spanish ranchos adopted the names already used for the land. One of these was Yokaya, which meant south valley in the Pomo language. When the Spanish and Mexicans came, they called the land Rancho Yokaya. Americans changed it to Ukiah. The northern California town of Ukiah, county seat of Mendocino County, is built upon the land of the old rancho.

The town and river of Truckee, at the California-Nevada border, were named in honor of a chief in a northern Paiute tribe.

Nine California counties claim names of Indian origin; Napa has already been mentioned. The counties of Modoc (south), Colusa, Mono, Tehama, Tuolumne, Yolo and Yuba took their names from Indian villages.

Shasta County has a name with several possible origins. Some authorities think it was named after a tribal chief who lived near the town of Yreka. Some say that there was a tribe called Shasta, or Shastika Indians. Mr. Shasta was called Yreka (mountain) by the Indians.

Mr. Shasta, wherever it found its name, is one of the most beautiful mountains on the Pacific Coast. Many are the Indian legends about it. They tell of the days when it was a volcano, or "tepee with a smoke hole" where an Indian spirit lived. No smoke curls up from the hole now but the spirit's tepee of ice and snow, Mr. Shasta is still there.