

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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California Place Names

There were 666 Spanish and Mexican land grants in what is now the State of California. Many of California's 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 important mountains, counties, rivers, cities, lakes, capes, and bays in California. Edwin G. Gudde is the author.

The very first listing in the book is Abalone, (abalohnee), 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 de 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.

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 Vizcaino expedition. The bay was also named in Spanish days; 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, some 10 miles inland. The Spanish spelling was used until 1860.

Chalone was named for an Indian tribe which lived east of the Soledad Mission. The name is mentioned in 1816,

a Cierro Chalon is on the map of the San Lorenzo land grant.

Chaparral, chap-a-ral. The original Spanish word, a thick growth of scrub oak. In California, the name applies to dense, sometimes impenetrable, thicket of scrub oaks and 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 Arroya de los Chopines in 1834. Probably from the Mexican chopo (thick 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 by the beautiful grove of trees nearby.

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

Golden Gate, named by Fremont in 1846 in analogy to the Golden Horn in Europe. He chose the name because he foresaw a 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 for Theodore Gonzales because it was built on his extensive grant.

Jolon. Ho-lohn. The place probably a Salinas Indian rancho, was recorded in the early 1800's. The name was applied to the post office in 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 word "Tablehill". There are more than 20 mesas in the state, together with a number of towns so named.