

## **Ethnohistory of the Tejon Indian Tribe**

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At the time of European contact, the southern San Joaquin Valley was a region of great linguistic and cultural diversity. At least eight different languages were spoken by the indigenous groups who resided in the valley and surrounding mountains. The Uto-Aztecan language family was represented by three languages, each in a different branch of that family (Golla 2011). The Kitanemuk, speaking a language in the Takic subfamily, were settled along Tejon Creek in the southern Tehachapi Mountains (Anderton 1988; Blackburn and Bean 1978). Just to their north were the Kawaiisu, speaking a Numic language related to the Southern Paiute and Ute of the Great Basin. The Tübatulabal resided in the upper Kern River watershed of the southern Sierra Nevada, speaking an isolate language belonging to its own branch within Uto-Aztecan. The Yokuts language family, like Uto-Aztecan, had its greatest linguistic diversity in the southern San Joaquin Region. The Yawelmani in the vicinity of Bakersfield spoke a dialect classified within the principal (Nim) Yokuts branch of the family. Surrounding Buena Vista and Kern lakes were Tulamni and Hometwoli tribes speaking dialects of the Buena Vista Yokuts language. The Palewyami on Poso Creek in the southern Sierra Nevada foothills spoke a Yokuts language, distinct from the others (Whistler and Golla 1986). Neighboring the San Joaquin Valley to the south and west were Chumash groups speaking an interior dialect of Ventureño in the Castac and San Emigdio regions and a language or languages of indeterminate affiliation in the Cuyama Valley and Carrizo Plain (Johnson and Tiley 2015). The Tejon Indian tribe includes descendants from all of these groups who settled on the Sebastian Reservation in the mid-nineteenth century (Johnson 2006a).

By 1840, a large number of Yokuts and Kitanemuk-speaking peoples who had been baptized at the missions returned to their former homes (Johnson 1997, 2006b; Phillips 2004). Peoples from Interior Chumash territory near Tejon Pass also reoccupied their former settlements and were accompanied by other Chumash-speaking peoples whom they had met at the missions, including some from the Santa Monica Mountains (Johnson and McLendon 1999). To some degree they continued to practice the agricultural activities learned at the missions, and they supplemented their subsistence with hunting and gathering wild crops. The Tejon region thereby became a refuge of Native peoples who wished to live apart from White civilization.

With the massive influx of Anglo-Americans during the Gold Rush, California Indian peoples living in the interior suffered from conflicts over incursions into their territories. To protect lives and property, the Federal Government sent an Indian peace commission to California in 1851 to negotiate

treaties with Native leaders and to allocate specific tracts of land where they would be secure from White intrusions (Phillips 1997). On June 10, 1851, a treaty was signed at Tejon Creek by the leaders of eleven tribes from the southern San Joaquin Valley region. In exchange for 763,000 acres to be reserved for Indian occupancy between Tejon Pass and the Kern River, the treaty ceded rights to most of the territory once occupied by people speaking Chumash languages (Crouter and Rolle 1960; Harrington 1985, 1986; Heizer 1972:38-41; Royce 1899).

In 1853, the Tejon region was visited by a party headed by Lt. R. S. Williamson, who were charged with finding the optimal route for the future Pacific Railroad. They surveyed several canyons and passes through the Tehachapi Mountains looking for the best exit from the San Joaquin Valley (Blake 1856; Williamson 1856). While Williamson's party was camped at Tejon, Lt. Edward Fitzgerald Beale arrived to establish one of the early Indian reservations in California (McGruder 1950; Williamson 1856:22). By the end of the summer of 1853, some 200 families had carried out extensive farming with Superintendent Beale's assistance. A reserve such as this had been promised by the Tejon Treaty signed in 1851, and Beale had been lobbying for its creation since his appointment in 1852 (Crouter and Rolle 1960). Within a few months of the establishment of the Sebastian Military Reserve at Tejon, a number of Yokuts, Tubatulabal, Kawaiisu, and San Fernando Mission groups were relocated to join the Kitanemuk, Yokuts, and Interior Chumash communities already settled in the Tejon region (Johnson 1997; Johnson and Earle 1990; Phillips 2004). Many of these eventually left, while those groups originally native to the Tejon stayed on (Latta 1977). By the next spring, an article in the *Los Angeles Star* (June 17, 1854) describes the Sebastian Military Reserve as consisting of "Seven Rancherías . . . which are governed by Chiefs and Sub-Chiefs." Most of these rancherías included several tribes. The article continues:

These Rancherías are located in different parts of the Reservation, and are so concealed by the openings of the mountains and rolling hills, that riding along the main trail, one would say there were not more than two or three hundred Indians on the Reservation; yet they actually number at this one time more than 1800, and are constantly increased by new arrivals.

Unfortunately, the political pressures on Superintendent Beale had been intensified by a change in administration in Washington, from Whig President Millard Fillmore to Democrat Franklin Pierce in January 1853, when Beale had been in office only nine months. Originally Beale was continued in office by President Pierce, but by early in 1854, the new Commissioner of Indian Affairs, George Manypenny, brought formal charges claiming that Beale's accounts were out of order and charging him with embezzlement. Beale was replaced by a Democrat, Thomas Henley, who within a few years would himself be accused of corruption and driven from office. According to Henley, a critic of Beale, the

number of Indians residing on the reservation in the fall of 1854 was estimated to be about 700, and they were represented by seventeen chiefs. In this same year Fort Tejon was established as a military outpost to guard the reserve (Giffen and Woodward 1942:37, 59).

Even before the establishment of the Sebastian Reserve, intermarriage had begun to unite the various Southern Valley groups. The mission experience had certainly accelerated this process, and many former Mission Indians came into the Tejon Region at the invitation of people whom they had known and/or to whom they were related through intermarriage at the missions. Nonetheless, the linguistically and politically distinct communities tended to remain separate under their own political leaders. Thus, Beale created a council of seven leading chiefs to assist him in his administration of the reservation (Crouter and Rolle 1960; Giffen and Woodward 1942; Phillips 2004). Contemporary ethnohistoric accounts and the ethnographic papers of Harrington and Merriam describe ceremonies in which all groups participated (Johnson 2000; Merriam 1955). Increasingly the Tejon Indian communities were interlinked by economic, social, familial, and political circumstances.

Meanwhile, Rancho El Tejon had been approved as a land grant in 1843 by the Mexican government of California and briefly occupied in 1845-46. On this slim basis, the Board of Land Commissioners ruled that the grant was valid in 1858, and a patent was issued a few years later in 1863. Nevertheless, the rights of the Tejon Indians were preserved under the terms of the grant: "The grantor shall not disturb the Tejon Indians in the cultivation of the land ... and gives to them the exclusive right of habitation, cultivation, grazing, hunting anywhere within its boundaries" (Giffen and Woodward 1942:41).

By 1864, when the Sebastian Military Reserve was closed and Fort Tejon was abandoned as a military outpost, Edward F. Beale had returned to the Tejon region and began to buy up four neighboring land grants, which he joined together to create his Tejon Ranch "empire," comprising over 150,000 acres (Giffen and Woodward 1942:45; Crowe 1957; McGruder 1950). Many of the Indians who had once been under Beale's supervision on the reservation continued to work for him as laborers after he acquired the ranchos. By all accounts, he enjoyed good rapport with the Tejon Indians, but that was not the case for some of the ranch managers who worked under him (Harrington 1985: RI. 100, Fr. 1057; Latta 1976:121). Gradually the Indians were forced from their small rancherías and homesteads to relocate to other settlements on the ranch. Eventually in 1875, all remaining Indians were moved to one ranchería in Tejon Canyon upstream from El Monte (Harrington 1985: RI. 101, Fr. 71).

The Tejon Indian population had declined considerably from its peak in the reservation years. A smallpox epidemic had taken many lives in 1862-63. Following the demise of the Sebastian Military Reserve, some Yokuts families moved to the reservation at Porterville, and a Ghost Dance held in 1873 at

*Kolpopow* near Glennville led to the exodus of additional Yokuts families who subsequently settled at Porterville (Gayton 1930; Harrington 1985: RI. 100, Fr. 1057). Charles Nordhoff, who visited the Tejon Ranch in 1872, reported that “about three hundred Indians . . . have been allowed to fence in small tracts of land on which they raise barley and other provisions, and in some cases plant fruit trees and vines” (quoted in Giffen and Woodward 1942:48).

In 1887 Beale hired Carleton E. Watkins, a well-known early California photographer, to document Rancho El Tejon. Watkins undertook this work while engaged in other photographic projects in Kern County near the end of his active career (Palmquist 1983:75-78). He created a whole series of images of buildings and people around the ranch. The Beale family portfolio of Watkins’s originals are at the Library of Congress, and other images are part of the collections at the Beale Memorial Library and Pioneer Museum in Bakersfield (Palmquist 1983:207). Several photographs taken by Watkins document conditions of Indian life at the Tejon Canyon ranchería. The captions accompanying the Watkins images in the Library of Congress consistently refer to the Indian community as a “reservation,” an identity it was to hold in the public mind until at least the mid-twentieth century, as is attested in county records and newspapers. Watkins’s captions for his photographs provide revealing information about life in the Tejon Indian community in the late nineteenth century (Johnson and McLendon 1999).

An adobe chapel was built in 1884 and dedicated the following summer (Harrington 1985: RI. 100, Fr. 1189; RI. 101, Fr. 71). Baptisms of Tejon Indians had always been a hit-or-miss proposition following mission secularization, due to the great distance of the Tejon Region from the missions near the coast. Beginning in 1878, Catholic priests from Visalia began actively proselytizing the Tejon Indians, baptizing many adults and children who had not previously been to the missions. Periodic visits to the Tejon Chapel were conducted, first by priests from Visalia, and later from Bakersfield and Tehachapi after churches were established in those towns.

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the population of the Tejon Canyon ranchería was tabulated several times by census takers and Indian agents. Counts ranged from a low of 47 persons in the 1910 census to 74 people listed in a special BIA census about 1915 (Johnson 2006a). The Indian community consisted of a series of adobe and wooden frame homes that dotted the sides of Tejon Canyon for several miles upstream from where the creek exited from the steep slopes of the southern Tehachapi Mountains. Fields and orchards were cultivated surrounding these dwellings. Members of the Tejon Indian community were interviewed there by C. H. Merriam in 1905, by Alfred Kroeber in 1906, and by J. P. Harrington and his wife, Carobeth, in 1916-1917. These anthropologists document a mixed tribal community who included members conversant in most of the native languages spoken the surrounding region (Harrington 1986; Kroeber 1907; Laird 1975; Merriam 1967).

In 1917, a survey and federal investigation were undertaken regarding the legal status of the Tejon Indian community. This investigation of conditions at the Tejon Canyon ranchería coincided with Harrington's visit. It eventually led to a suit by the Attorney General's Office against the Title Insurance and Trust Company to obtain permanent land rights for the Tejon Indians. Harrington was detailed from his position at the Smithsonian's Bureau of American Ethnology to assist with gathering Tejon Indian depositions for the case (Mills 1985:153-154). The case was argued all the way to the Supreme Court, but unfortunately that body decided against the government, which was acting on behalf of the Indians. In 1924 the Supreme Court ruled that the Indians, who had faithfully abided by the conditions of the 1851 treaty when they settled on the Sebastian Reserve, had given up their land rights by doing so and by not opposing the land grant claims subsequently submitted to the Commission that had been established to hear such claims. Such a decision seems grossly unfair today and was considered so at the time by advocates for Indian rights (Hathaway 1924).

Although the Supreme Court decision affected their legal status on the Tejon Ranch, the Company permitted the Indians to remain. The federal government supported an Indian school at the Tejon Ranchería, which educated the tribe's children for a period of about two decades. Although they lacked a federal reservation, the Tejon Indians continued to be included on Department of Interior maps showing federally-recognized tribes in California. About forty residents still occupied the old adobes in Tejon Canyon until the magnitude 7.7 Tehachapi Earthquake ruined their homes on July 21, 1952. Fortunately, occupants were unharmed because they were following the traditional practice of sleeping outdoors on warm summer nights.

Following the 1954 earthquake, some Indian homes were rebuilt with federal assistance. Tejon Indians continued to work and live on the Tejon Ranch even down to the present day, although employment opportunities elsewhere led most to live in neighboring areas. The federal government rendered assistance to the Tejon Indians for health needs and vocational training through the remainder of the twentieth century. The Tejon Indian families over time had intermarried so there were strong bonds of kinship within the tribe. Regular tribal gatherings maintained a strong sense of community. Beginning in 1997, under the leadership of Chairwoman Kathy Morgan, the tribe renewed an effort to regain their federal recognition status. In 2012 after a thorough "review of all facts and history of this matter," Larry Echo-Hawk, Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs, affirmed the Tejon Indian Tribe's government-to-government status with the United States by reinstating the tribe to the list of federally recognized tribes (US Department of Interior 2012).

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