

Summary of History of California before 1900

(or everything you need to know about California History, with acknowledgement to Wikipedia)



Native peoples

13,000 years ago some 30 tribes or culture groups lived in what is now California, gathered into perhaps six different language family groups. This cultural diversity was among the densest in North America. The total population of Native California is estimated, by the time of extensive European contact in the 18th century, to have been 300,000. Before Europeans landed in North America, about one-third of all natives in what is now the United States were living in the area that is now California.

The Native Americans of California had no domesticated animals except dogs, no pottery; their tools were made out of wood, leather, woven baskets and netting, stone, and antler. Some shelters were made of branches and mud; some dwellings were built by digging into the ground 2 to 3 feet (61 to 91 cm) and then constructing a brush shelter on top covered with animal skins. A dietary staple for most indigenous populations in interior California was acorns.

European Exploration (1530–1765)

Spanish and English explorers sailed the coast from the early 16th century to the mid-18th century but did not establish settlements. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, a soldier and navigator who sailed for the Spanish Crown, is believed to have been the first European to explore the California coast. He landed on September 28th, 1542, at San Diego Bay. Cabrillo and his men found that there was essentially nothing for the Spanish to easily exploit in California, located at the extreme limits of exploration and trade from Spain. He died during the expedition.

English privateer and explorer Francis Drake explored a portion of the California coast in 1579, landing at Drake's Cove near Point Reyes. (He purportedly missed San Francisco Bay because of the fog.) He claimed sovereignty of the area for England as *Nova Albion*.

In 1565, the Spanish developed a trading route where they took gold and silver from the Americas and traded it for goods and spices from China and other Asian areas. The Spanish set up their main base in Manila in the Philippines, sailing via California to utilize the wind and currents. Spanish ships plying the China trade probably stopped in California every year after 1680. Between 1680 and 1740, Spanish merchants out of Mexico City financed thriving trade between Manila and Mexico.

Spanish Colonization ~1750-1810

During the last quarter of the 18th century, the first Spanish settlements were established in what later became the Las Californias Province of the Viceroyalty of New Spain. Reacting to interest by the Russians and, later, the British in the fur-bearing animals of the Pacific north coast, Spain further extended the series of Catholic missions, accompanied by troops and establishing ranches, along the southern and central coast of California. These missions were intended to demonstrate the claim of the Spanish Empire to what is now California. By 1823, 21 Spanish missions had been established in Alta California.

Junípero Serra and the Missions

Fr. Junípero Serra, a Majorcan Franciscan friar, founded the first Alta California Spanish missions. After King Carlos III ordered the Jesuits expelled from New Spain on February 3, 1768, Serra was named "Father Presidente". Serra founded San Diego de Alcalá in 1769, after which Serra, Governor de Portolá and a small group of men moved north, up the Pacific Coast. The California missions comprise a series of religious outposts established by Spanish Catholic Franciscans to spread the Christian doctrine among the local Native Americans. The mission settlements were situated approximately 30 miles apart, so that they were separated by one day's long ride on horseback along the 600-mile-long *El Camino Real*.

Four presidios (forts), strategically placed along the California coast and organized into separate military districts, served to protect the missions and other Spanish settlements in Upper California. In addition to the *presidio* (royal fort) and *pueblo* (town), the *misión* was one of the three major agencies employed by the Spanish crown in an attempt to consolidate its colonial territories. Most missions became enormous in terms of

land area, and yet had a small Spanish and Mexican staff surrounded by much larger Indian congregations. All of these buildings were built largely by the native people, under Franciscan supervision. There is controversy as to whether the labor was forced.

In 1810, the California missions and presidios lost their financing as the Spanish Empire collapsed.

Russian colonization (1812–1841)

Part of Spain's motivation to settle upper Las Californias was to forestall Russian colonization of the region. In the early 19th century, fur trappers with the Russian-American Company of Imperial Russia explored down the West Coast from trading settlements in Alaska, hunting for sea otter pelts as far south as San Diego. In August 1812, the Russian-American Company set up a fortified trading post at Fort Ross, 60 miles north of San Francisco on land claimed, but not occupied, by the British Empire. This colony was active until the Russians departed in 1839.



Alta California

Mexican Alta California (1821–1846)

- (Or briefly, if you don't have time: mini-armies ran round California)

For the next decade and a half after 1809, the colony came to rely upon trade with Anglo-Americans and Spanish-Americans from further south for economic survival and political news. The victory in the Mexican War of Independence from Spain in 1821 marked the beginning of Mexican rule in California. The 1824 Constitution of Mexico refers to Alta California as a "territory". In 1825, independent Mexico finally send a governor to take control of California, but he arrived without adequate payroll for the military to administer the territory. In 1827 the Mexican Congress had passed the General Law of Expulsion, which declared that all persons born in Spain to be "illegal immigrants" and ordered them to leave the new country of Mexico. By 1829, the foreign (i.e., Spanish) missionaries had been removed from the scene, though some clung on until 1834.

In 1831 a small group. Leading wealthy citizens of Alta California petitioned for democratic reforms and suggested that the popular previous governor, José María de Echeandía, replace Governor Manuel Victoria. They built up a small army, marched into Los Angeles, and "captured" the town. Victoria gathered a small army and went to fight the upstart army, leading it himself. He met the opposing army on December 5, 1831, at Cahuenga Pass. In the Battle of Cahuenga Pass Victoria was wounded and resigned the governorship of Alta California. Echeandía, became governor again until 1833.

In 1833 the Mexican Congress passed *An Act for the Secularization of the Missions of California*. The military received legal permission to distribute the Indian congregations' land amongst themselves in 1834. In April 1836 the unpopular Mariano Chico was appointed governor. Chico returned to Mexico for troops and Nicolás Gutiérrez reassumed the governorship. Senior members of Alta California's legislature, Juan Alvarado and José Castro, with support from military Comandante Mariano Vallejo, and assistance from a group of Americans led by Isaac Graham, staged a revolt in November 1836 and forced Gutierrez to relinquish power. The Americans wanted Californian independence, but Alvarado instead preferred staying part of Mexico, albeit with greater autonomy.

In 1840, Graham began agitating for revolution in California. Alvarado notified Vallejo of the situation, and the Californian military began arresting American and English immigrants, detaining about 100 in the Presidio of Monterey. At the time, there were fewer than 400 foreigners from all nations in the department. Vallejo returned to Monterey and ordered Castro to take 47 of the prisoners to Mexico by ship, to be deported to their home countries. Under pressure from American and British diplomats, President Anastasio Bustamante released the remaining prisoners and began a court-martial against Castro. In 1841, Graham and 18 of his associates returned to Monterey, with new passports issued by the Mexican federal government.

In 1841, political leaders in the United States were declaring their doctrine of Manifest Destiny, and Californios grew increasingly concerned over their intentions. Vallejo recommended that Mexico send military reinforcements to enforce their military control of California.

In response, Mexican president Antonio de Santa Anna sent Brigadier General Manuel Micheltorena and 300 men to California in January 1842. Before Micheltorena reached Monterey, American Commodore Thomas Jones mistakenly thought that war had broken out between the United States and Mexico. He sailed into Monterey Bay and demanded the surrender of the Presidio of Monterey. Alvarado reluctantly surrendered. The next day Commodore Jones learned of his mistake, but Alvarado referred the commodore to Micheltorena.

By 1844 Micheltorena was under orders to organize a large contingent in preparation for war against the United States. This backfired in November 14, 1844, when a group of Californios revolted against Mexican authority. There was no actual fighting; a truce was negotiated and Micheltorena agreed to dismiss his troops. Micheltorena then reneged on the deal and fighting broke out. The rebels won the Battle of Providencia in February 1845 at the Los Angeles River, and Micheltorena and his troops left California.

California Republic and the Mexican–American War (1846–1848)

After the United States declared war on Mexico on May 13, 1846, it took almost two months (mid-July 1846) for word of war to get to California. U.S. consul Thomas Larkin, stationed in Monterey, tried to keep peace between the Americans and the small Mexican military garrison. American army captain John Frémont, with about 60 well-armed men, entered California in December 1845 and was making a slow march to Oregon when they received word that war between Mexico and the U.S. was imminent.

On June 15, 1846, some 30 non-Mexican settlers, mostly Americans, staged a revolt, seized the small Mexican garrison in Sonoma, and captured Mexican general Mariano Vallejo. They raised the "Bear Flag" of the California Republic over Sonoma. The so-called *California Republic* lasted one week(!), with William Ide as its president, until Frémont arrived with his U.S. army detachment and took over military command on June 23. The California state flag today is based on the original Bear Flag, and still contains the words "California Republic".



American Conquest

- (Cliff notes version: The US forces land, battle the Californians, and take over. Mexico cedes California to the US.)

US navy Commodore John Sloat, landed at Monterey ordered his naval forces to occupy Yerba Buena (present San Francisco) on July 7, 1846, and raise the American flag. On July 23, Sloat transferred his command to Commodore Robert Stockton. Commodore Stockton put Frémont's "California Battalion" under his command: the Mexican–American War was on. The U.S. naval forces easily took over the north of California. In Southern California, the Mexican generals abandoned Los Angeles. Stockton's forces entered Los Angeles unresisted on August 13, 1846; the nearly bloodless conquest of California seemed complete. Stockton left too small a force in Los Angeles, and the Californians forced the small American garrison to retire in late September.

Reinforcements were sent by Stockton, but were repulsed in the Battle of Dominguez Rancho, October 7–9, 1846. Meanwhile, General Kearny with a much-reduced squadron of 100 dragoons finally reached California after a grueling march from Santa Fe, New Mexico across the Sonoran Desert. On December 6, 1846, they fought the Battle of San Pasqual near San Diego. Stockton rescued Kearny's surrounded troops and their combined force moved northward from San Diego linking up with Frémont's northern force. With the combined American forces totaling 660 troops, they fought the Californians in the Battle of Rio San Gabriel. The next day, January 9, 1847, they fought the Battle of La Mesa. Three days later, on January 12, 1847, the last significant body of Californians surrendered to American forces. That marked the end of the war in California. On January 13, 1847, the Treaty of Cahuenga was signed.

On January 26, 1847, Army lieutenant William Tecumseh Sherman and his unit arrived in Monterey. On March 15, 1847, Col. Jonathan Stevenson's Seventh Regiment of New York Volunteers of about 900 men began to arrive. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, on February 2, 1848, Mexico formally ceded California to the United States.

Westward Migration by Wagon Trains: the Donner party

Lansford Hastings, an early migrant from Ohio to the West, went to California in 1842 and saw the promise of the undeveloped country. To encourage settlers, he published *The Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*. He proposed a more direct route which would take travelers across the Great Salt Lake Desert. (Hastings had not traveled any part of his proposed shortcut until early 1846.) The most difficult part of the journey to California was the last 100 miles across the Sierra Nevada. The eastern side of the range, the Sierra Escarpment, is also notoriously steep. After a wagon train left Missouri to cross the vast wilderness to Oregon or California, timing was crucial to ensure that it would not be bogged down by mud created by spring rains or by massive snowdrifts in the mountains from September onward. The journey typically took six months,

In the spring of 1846, almost 500 wagons headed west from Independence, Missouri. The Reed and Donner families departed on May 12. The party elected to follow a new route called the Hastings Cutoff. By early November, the migrants, after various difficulties, had reached the Sierra Nevada, but became trapped by an early, heavy snowfall high in the mountains. Their food supplies ran dangerously low, and in mid-December some of the group set out on foot to obtain help. Rescuers from California attempted to reach the migrants, but the first relief party did not arrive until the middle of February 1847, almost four months after the wagon train became trapped. Some of the migrants resorted to cannibalism to survive, primarily eating the bodies of those who had succumbed to starvation, sickness or extreme cold, but in one case two Native American guides were deliberately killed for this purpose. Of the 87 members of the party, 48 survived the ordeal.

The Gold Rush

In January 1848, gold was discovered in a creek at Sutter's Mill in the Sierra Nevada foothills about 40 miles east of Sacramento – beginning the California Gold Rush. The miners settled in towns along the Sierra foothills. The nearest deep-water seaport was San Francisco Bay, and the rapidly growing town of San Francisco became the home for suppliers, and bankers who financed exploration for gold.

The non-Indian population of California in 1840 was about 8,000. (The Indian population is variously estimated at 30,000 to 150,00.) By 1852 the population had increased to about 200,000, of which about 10% were female. By 1855, some 300,000 "Forty-Niners" had arrived, though many soon left. A precipitous drop in the Native American population occurred in the decade after the discovery of gold.

Succession?

Californians, dissatisfied with inequitable taxes and land laws, attempted three times in the 1850s to achieve a separate statehood or territorial status separate from Northern California. The last attempt, the Pico Act of 1859, was passed by the California State Legislature, signed by the state governor, approved overwhelmingly by voters in the proposed "Territory of Colorado" and sent to Washington, D.C., with a strong advocate in Senator Milton Latham. The proposal never coming to a vote.

California Genocide (1846–1871)

On several occasions between 1849 and 1870 it is estimated that American colonists murdered some 9,500 California natives.

The rise of Nativism

Thousands of Chinese men arrived in California to work as laborers, recruited by industry as low-wage workers. Over time, conflicts in the gold fields and cities created resentment toward the Chinese laborers. During the decade-long depression after the transcontinental railroad was completed, white workers began to lay blame on the Chinese laborers. Many Chinese were expelled from the mine fields. Some returned to China after the

Central Pacific was built. Those who stayed mostly moved to the Chinatowns in San Francisco and other cities, where they were relatively safe from violent attacks they suffered elsewhere.

The Railroad Reaches California

In 1862, the Pacific Railroad Act chartered the Central Pacific and the Union Pacific Railroad Companies, tasking them with building a transcontinental railroad that would link the United States from east to west. Over the next seven years, the two companies would race toward each other from Omaha, Nebraska on the one side, and from Sacramento, California on the other. They met at Promontory, Utah, on May 10, 1869.

Progress by the Central Pacific was slow through the Sierra. The demand for labor increased, and white workers were reluctant to do such backbreaking, hazardous work. By that time, some 50,000 Chinese immigrants were living on the West Coast, many having arrived during the Gold Rush. In January 1865, convinced that Chinese workers were capable, the railroad hired 50 Chinese workers and then 50 more. The Chinese laborers proved to be tireless workers, and Central Pacific hired more of them; some 14,000 were toiling under brutal working conditions in the Sierra Nevada by early 1867. To blast through the mountains, the Central Pacific built huge wooden trestles on the western slopes, and used gunpowder and nitroglycerine to blast tunnels through the granite. Leland Stanford, president of Central Pacific, former (1862-63) California governor and founder of Stanford University, told Congress in 1865, that the majority of the railroad labor force were Chinese. "Without them," he said, "it would be impossible to complete the western portion of this great national enterprise, within the time required by the Acts of Congress." More Chinese immigrants began arriving in California, and two years later, about 90 percent of the workers were Chinese.

The establishment of America's transcontinental rail lines permanently linked California to the rest of the country, and the far-reaching transportation systems that grew out of them during the century that followed contributed immeasurably to the state's unrivaled social, political, and economic development.