

How MOTHER CALIFORNIA named HER BABIES

History, Fiction, Association and Chance Played Each Its Part. When Towns, Rivers and Crossroads Came Up to Be Christened

JUST how California came to choose the names for many of her towns, streams and places is often a matter of interesting research and speculation. A Californian who has devoted a great deal of time to investigation of this kind is Judge W. A. Anderson of Sacramento. In much of his work Judge Anderson was assisted by the late Win J. Davis. Their researches have brought to light many interesting historical facts that were all but lost because no official record had ever been made of them. Judge Anderson published some of his findings in the Sacramento Union recently and they are republished here in the belief that they will prove of utmost interest to readers of the Sunday Call. No attempt is made here to deal with the very large number of names derived from Spanish sources.

The American river was named from the fact that a company of western trappers lived on its banks for several years between 1822 and 1830.

When the town of Arcata was located on April 21, 1850, it was called Union. In 1860 the name was changed to Arcata—an Indian word.

Auburn was originally called "Wood's Dry Diggins." Late in 1849 a public meeting was held for the purpose of selecting a more suitable name for the town. The name Auburn was adopted at the suggestion of H. M. House, who had come from New York Auburn.

Bakersfield was named in honor of Senator Thomas Baker, who died in that town November 24, 1872; Bantas from Henry Bantas, an early settler. Belmont signifies "beautiful mountain," and was named from the grand eminences near the town; Bernal Heights from Augustin Bernal, and Black's Station from J. J. Black, who located the town in 1855. Bodie was named in honor of William S. Bodie, a pioneer who lost his life in November, 1859, near his cabin, four miles from the site of the town, having become exhausted in a heavy snowstorm. Brooklyn, Alameda county, was christened by Thomas Egar after the ship Brooklyn, in which he came in 1846 as a passenger to California.

Calistoga is a word that was formed by the late Samuel Brannan from the words "California" and "Saratoga." Camptonville was named after J. Campton. Capay is from the Indian word "capi," meaning "creek." Carquinez is an Indian word meaning "serpent."

Legend of Vallejo

According to a legend of the aborigines, from a hill that now exists in the city of Vallejo (Capitol hill), there would come forth a huge serpent with



eyes of fire, it would straighten itself on its tall almost perpendicularly and look toward the straits, then cautiously on Mare Island (Taxpeyar was the Indian name), and lastly in the direction of Yulupa, or the Sunset hills toward Sonoma, looking for the blazing turkey, which was wont to arise from the air of the mountains, and if the gaze of these two monsters ever met it was a sign or omen of some terrible disaster or calamity—such as war or pestilence.

Cherokee, Nevada county, was so called from the fact that the first prospecting there was done by some Cherokee Indians in 1850. Clayton was named after its founder, Joel Clayton, and Colfax in honor of Vice President Schuyler Colfax. Coloma is an Indian word, meaning "beautiful valley." Crockett was named in honor of Judge J. B. Crockett, who died January 15, 1848; Davisville was called after Jerome C. Davis, who settled there in 1846 and who died in Sacramento October 5, 1881, while holding the office of second trustee of the city; Decoto was named after Ezra Decoto, the owner of the land on which it is located; Dixon after Thomas Dixon, who died in that town in June, 1855, and Donahue after Colonel James M. Donahue.

Donner lake gets its name from the

leader of the Donner party of 1846, the members of which suffered privation and death on its shores. Downville was named after William Downie, who located there in the early mining days; Dunnigan gets its name from A. W. Dunnigan, who settled there in 1853; Dutch Flat was so named from the fact that its pioneer settler was a German named Joseph Dohrenbeck.

Elk Horns at Elk Grove

Elk Grove was so called from the circumstances that elk horns were found in a grove of timber near which in 1850 James Hall established a hotel, on the sign of which was painted an elk.

The name of Florin was given to that locality about 1864 by the late Judge E. B. Crocker, owing to the great number of wild flowers which grew there, and when the town was started in 1875 it received that name. Folsom was called after J. L. Folsom, who died July 19, 1855. There is some romance about the naming of Forest City, Sierra county. The first store at the forks of Oregon creek was built by Samuel Hammond and was called Yonana store, from the bluff above the town being called by that name—meaning "Sacred Hill." In 1853 a meeting of the citizens was held to select a name for the town and there was a tie vote for "Forks of Oregon" and "Yonana."

The matter was compromised by agreeing to call the place after the first woman who should reside there. The first lady inhabitant was Mary Davis, the wife of a baker, and after her advent the town was indiscriminately called "Forks of Oregon" and "Maricotta." Davis soon sold out to Captain Mooney, whose wife's name was Forest. She was a lady of education and wrote several articles which were sent to the Marysville papers. They were dated Forest City, and as the editor did not know where that might be they were so published. Mrs. Mooney afterward called together some of the leading citizens and succeeded in having the place formally named after her.

During the summer of 1848 travelers stopped at a spring at the site of Jackson, Amador county, and the number of bottles left about gave it the name of Bottlesville. It was changed to Jackson in honor of Colonel Jackson, who afterward settled there.

Fort Ross is the site of a Russian settlement which was made in 1811 and a fort erected there. What the Russians called it is not known, but it was called by the Spaniards "Fuerte de los Rusos" (Fort of the Russians). The Americans shortened it to Fuerte Ruso and that was afterward curtailed to its present name.

French Corral was named from the circumstances that in 1849 a Frenchman built a corral for the inclosure of his mules on the site of the present village.

At one time the inhabitants adopted the name of Carrolton, but for no great length of time. Fulton was laid out in 1871 by Thomas and James Fulton—hence its name. The name Galt was suggested for that town when it was laid out by John McFarland to the late Judge E. B. Crocker. McFarland, when quite a young man, located in the town of Galt, in upper Canada, and there served his apprenticeship as a joiner. The Canadian Galt was named after a man of that name.

Gilroy was named in honor of John Gilroy, one of the earliest American settlers, who died in that town on July 29, 1869. Goat Island was called by the Spaniards Yerba Buena, and was originally occupied as a fishing station by a very numerous tribe of Indians called Tutchayunes. On the founding of the city of San Francisco in 1845, the name of the island (Yerba Buena) was given to the municipality. In 1835 Nathaniel Spear brought some goats from the Sandwich Islands, and presented a pair of them to John Fuller, who was located in the town. They became so destructive to his flowers and garden truck that he removed them to the island, where they were



turned loose and rapidly increased in numbers. Hence the name of Goat Island. It is stated that in 1849 there were



nearly 1,000 goats on the island, but they were soon destroyed by the immigrants. The name Golden Gate first appears in the "Geographical Memoirs of California" and relative map, published by Colonel John C. Fremont in the spring of 1848. The name was



probably suggested by the Golden horn of Constantine.

Grayson was located in 1849 by J. Grayson & Co., and Guerneville was named after A. L. Guerne. Martinez was named after Ignacio Martinez, who settled in the country in 1823.

Halfmoon Bay was so named on account of its configuration. Halo Chemuc was formerly quite an Indian town on the west bank of the Sacramento river, a few miles above its mouth. The name in Indian meant "nothing to eat." Havilah was named from the place mentioned in the Old Testament, where the first allusion is made to a land of gold. Genesis 11, 12: "The name of the first is Pison; that it is which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; and the gold in that land is good; there is bellium and the onyx stone." Hayward was named after William Hayward, who settled there in 1851; Headsburg after Harmon G. Heald; Hicksville after William Hicks; Hollister after an early Scotch settler of that name.

The valley of Ions was named before the town was started by Thomas Brown, a great reader, after Ione, one of the heroines of Bulwer's "Last Days of Pompeii." The town was first called Bedbug, then Freezout, and finally the people christened it Ione.

Knights Landing was called after William Knight, who settled there in 1843, and Knight's Ferry after the same gentleman from the fact that he established a trading post there in 1848.

Langville was named after J. A. Lang. The locality of Little York was settled in early days largely by miners from New York and other middle states. Afterward numbers came from Missouri and the west. An election was held to determine the name of the district, and the eastern men outvoted those from the west and adopted the name of Little York over St. Louis, the choice of the minority. Livermore was named after Robert Livermore, who settled in the valley before the American conquest and who died on February 14, 1858. Lockwood was named after its founder, Dr. D. J. Locke.

In 1841 Theodore Cordus settled in the fork of the Yuba and Feather rivers, where the city of Marysville now stands, under a lease from Captain Sutter. Cordus afterward sold out his interest under the lease, and it became the property of Charles Covilland, John Sampson, J. M. Ramirez and Theodore Sicard. In January, 1850, the town was laid out by these four parties under the name of C. Covilland & Co. There were a variety of opinions as to what should be the name of the place. Some wanted it called Ybaville, and some deeds were made out in that name. Others desired to call it Yuba City, some Norwich and some Sicardora, that being the favorite of Colonel Ferry. While the discussion of the name was pending a public meeting was called to take into consideration the general interests of the new city. At that meeting Captain Edward Power from St. Louis, proposed to name it after Mrs. Covilland, who was then the only white woman living in the town. Her name being Mary, it was then and there determined that the city should be called Marysville. Mrs. Covilland died in that city on September



17, 1867. While Cordus was in possession the place was called New Mecklenburg.

The McLeod, or McCloud, river receives its name from an old Scotch trapper, who in 1827 or 1828 led the first party of Hudson Bay company trappers that ever penetrated California. His name was Alexander Roger-McLeod. Years after a well known citizen named Ross McCloud, a surveyor, lived on the stream, and the similarity of the pronunciation of the names led to the common error of supposing that his name was the one that the river bore. Meridian was so called because the postoffice is only a quarter of a mile west of the Mount Diablo meridian. United States survey, Michigan Bar was so called from the fact that the first settlers were two men from Michigan, who discovered gold there in 1848.

The Mokelumne river derives its name from a powerful tribe of Indians, the Mokol-kos, who inhabited its lower banks and the adjacent territory. The Spaniards spelled the word differently. Moores Flat was first named from H. M. Moore, who settled there and built a store in 1851. Mormon Island was so named from the fact that gold washing was commenced there soon after the discovery by Marshall, by a party of Mormons. Natoma is of Indian derivation, and signifies "clear water." Needles is so called on account of the spire, or needle like shape of certain rocks which were called the Needles in that vicinity.

Newark was named by its founders after the New Jersey city, of which they were natives. New York of the Pacific was a wonderful city—on paper—in 1848. At one time it aspired to become the capital of the state. It was located by Colonel J. D. Stevenson, and was called in honor of his regiment, which was called the New York regiment. Nicolaus was named after Nicolaus Aligier, who arrived in the country in 1840, and who settled there in 1842.

North San Juan acquired its name from this circumstance: In 1853, a miner named Kent, who had accompanied General Scott when his expedition landed at Vera Cruz, was engaged in mining near the present site of the town. One evening he was impressed with the fancied resemblance of a bluff hill near by to the castle of San Juan de Ulloa, which guards the entrance to the port of Vera Cruz. He expressed his opinion, and the bluff was dubbed San Juan. Afterward that name was applied to the town. In 1857, when an application was made for a postoffice to be established there, the authorities at Washington required a new name for the place, as an office had already been established at another town of that title in Monterey county. The citizens thereupon adopted the prefix "North" to the name. Northville was named after Noah Norton, the locator of the Black Diamond coal mine. Oakland was so called from the fact that immense live oak grew on its site.

The region of Owens lake was visited in 1845 by a detachment of Fremont's expedition, under the noted mountaineer, Captain Joe Walker. This party was accompanied by Professor



Richard Owens, who was the first white man to see the lake, and after him the lake, river and valley were named. Pacheco was named after Don Salvo Pacheco, who settled there in



1834, and who died in 1876. Petaluma is an Indian word, said by some to mean "Duck Ponds" and by others "Little Hills." Piedmont is the French for "foothills." Pigeon Point was so named from the fact that on May 6, 1853, the clipper ship Carrier Pigeon, from Boston, was totally wrecked there, and a large number of passengers were drowned. Pit river received its name from a custom of the Indians tying its banks of digging pits in which to capture bear, deer and even intruding warriors of strange tribes. The pits were covered with brush and dirt to conceal them.

Placerville was originally called Hangtown and was so named from this circumstance: In January, 1849, three men were in a saloon tent engaged in a game of poker. When the game broke up the proprietor was asleep and the men robbed him at the point of the pistol. The next day they were arrested and hanged to a tree. Pleasanton was first called Allisal (cottonwood), but was afterwards named by John W. Kottlinger in honor of General Pleasanton, a cavalry officer in the union army.

Story of Hangtown

Red Bluff was established by M. L. Covert, and was first called Covertburg. Redding was originally called Reading, after Major E. B. Reading, the pioneer of Shasta county. The change to the present spelling was done in compliment to the late E. B. Redding. Red Dog Hill was so named because of its supposed resemblance to a hill of that name in the lead district of Illinois. Redwood City was so called from its proximity to the forests of redwood timber that formerly covered the slopes of the mountains. Rough and Ready was established in the fall of 1849 by the Rough and Ready company of immigrants who had just arrived from Wisconsin under the command of Captain Townsend. Routiers was named after Hon. Joseph Routier. Scott river and mountain were named from John W. Scott, who mined on Scott bar in 1849.

Sebastopol, Sonoma county, was at first called Pine Grove. During the Crimean war, and at the time when Sebastopol was besieged, two men engaged in a fight in the town, and retreated into the store and the proprietor refused to admit the victorious party. From this circumstance the store was called Sebastopol, and the town was subsequently so named.

Shingle Springs was named from the fact that at the upper end of the town were several springs of water. At an early day, near the springs, a machine was erected and operated for the manufacture of shingles. Hence the name.

Stevensville was named from Francis Somers, an early resident. The mountain of St. Helena was named in honor of the empress of Russia, by the Russian naturalist, Woznesensky, who ascended it in 1841.

When the settlement at Stockton was started it was called and known everywhere as Weber's settlement, or as French camp—the latter name being the better known. Captain C. M. Weber and his partner were undecided as to the name of the new town. New Albany was the choice of the partner, because of his birth in Albany, New York. Weber preferred either Tulareburg or Castoria. Tulareburg was regarded as appropriate because the tule grew thick and high in the vicinity. Castoria is a Spanish name, meaning beaver settlement. At that time Weber promised to send out a government steamer for the use of the pioneers. At Weber's suggestion the name of the town was changed to Stockton, and it was first legally



known by that name in a petition to the court of sessions, dated July 23, 1850.

Suisun is an Indian word meaning "big expanse." Sunol was named after Antonio M. Sunol, an early resident, who died March 18, 1866. Suscol was the name of an Indian chief, Sweetland was named after H. P. Sweetland, who settled there in 1850. Sutter Creek was named from the fact that in 1848 Captain Sutter came through that country with a retinue of Indians on an excursion to the mountains and camped on the spot where Sutter Creek now stands, which event gave the town its name.

The derivation of the word "Tahoe" has, perhaps, been more elaborately discussed than that of any other word of geographical designation in the state. The republicans contended that it was an Indian word, meaning "big water." The democrats declared the name of the lake to be "Bigler," in honor of the ex-governor. In the debates in the legislature the matter of the name of the lake became almost a partisan issue. The democrats favored the name Bigler, and the republicans Tahoe. The democrats claimed that the name Tahoe had been borne by a respectable and vicious Indian chief who had murdered an American family named Rothrock on the Truckee river in early days. The republicans contended that it was an Indian word, meaning "big water."

A correspondent in the Sacramento Union of February 3, 1850, claimed that the word was a corruption of "Tejón" or badger, and that the lake had been so called by the half converted Indians who had fled to the mountains to escape servitude to the Spaniards—the region about the lake being prolific with badgers. The correspondent has no doubt in error. Tehachapi is an Indian word of unknown signification. Temescal is an Indian word, meaning "Swathouse."

Origin of Truckee

Tomales bay was named after a tribe of Indians of that name who lived in that vicinity.

William Baldrige, a very early pioneer, writes the following account of the derivation of the word "Truckee": In 1845, James M. Harbin and a few others were on their way to California, via overland route, and on arriving at the sink of the Humboldt, they met an Indian and engaged him to guide them across the desert. While en route Harbin noticed a resemblance in him to the Indian he had formerly known (Truckee) they were greatly elated at their good fortune, and named the Truckee river as "Truckee" and two of his brothers came to California with the immigrants in 1846, and served in Fremont's battalion until the end of the war.

The Reno Gazette, in 1880, published the following account of the same incident:

In 1844 a party of men left Council Bluffs, Iowa, to go to Oregon. They came across the plains, and when they reached the hunting grounds of the Shoshones they procured an Indian guide named Truckee. This Indian accompanied them as far as Sutter's fort. In traversing this region the Indian told them of a rapid river that flowed from one great lake to another. The party did not reach Truckee's river as they expected, and they began to look upon Truckee's river as a river in mind. A flowing action. Truckee's river was for a time a frequent jest upon the lips and when at last they reached the stream he described they had already named it.

Ukiah derives its name from the Enkio or Ynkio tribe of Indians, who dwelt in the valley when it was first visited by the whites. Vallejo was founded by General M. G. Vallejo, from whom it received its name. It was for a short time the capital of the state. Visalia was named after Nat Vise, a bear hunter, who lived there in early days. Walloupa was named after an Indian chief. It is a corruption of Guadalupe, the name which



he had received from the missionaries. Washoe is the Indian name for the valley lying along the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada. The word signifies "beautiful." Watsonville was named after J. H. Watson, who founded it in 1850. Weaver's name was named after an earlier named Weaver, who at an early period obtained a large quantity of gold from Weaver creek. Winters was laid out in 1875, and was named in honor of Theodore Winters, who owned an interest in the townsite; and Woodbridge was named after its founder, J. H. Woods. Yosemite is an Indian name signifying rocky falls, and was given to the forks of the Cosumnes river in Amador county. Yosemite is a corruption of "Oo-soom-ite," an Indian word meaning, in the language of the tribe, that inhabited the valley, "large grizzly bear." Yountville was named after George C. Yount, who died October 5, 1865. The town of Yreka was originally called Shasta Butte City, but this was too much like Shasta City, the Indian name for Mount Shasta, I-e-ha (meaning white), was substituted, and the orthography was changed to Yreka. In the course of time the W was dropped, and the present spelling adopted.

Names of Mining Days

Appended are a few of those names bestowed on localities by the miners in early days. It is not necessary to trace their derivation, as they are sufficiently suggestive:

American Hollow, Barefoot Diggins, Bloomer Hill, Blue Bely Ravine, Bob Ridley Flat, Bogus Thunder, Brandy Gulch, Coyote Hill, Centipede Hollow, Chicken Thief Flat, Christian Flat, Chucklehead Diggins, Coon Hollow, Deadman's Bar, Dead Zule Canyon, Deadwood, Devils Basin, Devils Elbow, Gas Hill, Git-up-and-git, Gopher Flat, Gospe Gulch, Gouge-eye, Graveyard Canyon, Sulky Flat, Greasers Camp, Grubstake Canyon, Grubstake Flat, Goose Flat, Whisky Bar, Grizzly Flat, Groundhog Glory, Happy Valley, Hell's Delight, Humpback Slide, Henroost Camp, Horse Diggins, Hot Town, Wilder Canyon, Hungry Camp, Jackson Gulch, Jim Crow Canyon, Last Chance, Lazy Man's Canyon, Liberty Hill, Loafer Hill, Loafer's Retreat, Battlesnake Bar, Long Tom, Louey Ravine, Love Letter Camp, Mad Canyon, Miller's Defeat, Mount Zion, Murderers Bar, Nary Red, Nigger Hill, Nutcake Camp, One Eye, Paintpot Hill, Panake Bay, Parady, Pepperbox Flat, Piety Hill, Pike Hill, Plughed Gulch, Poker Flat, Poodletown, Poor Man's Creek, Fort Wine, Poverty Hill, Puppysown, Push Coach Hill, Quack Hill, Ragtown, Rattrap Slide, Seven-by-Nine Valley, Sevenup Ravine, Seventy-shanghai Hill, Shimbone Peak, Shirl-tail Canyon, Skinnint, Skunk Gulch, Slapack Bar, Sluce Fork, Snow Point, Sugarloaf Hill, Swellhead Diggins, Wildcat Bar, Yankee Doodle.

The name Arizona was first applied to a mountain near the southern boundary of the territory. The territory was first called Pimeria. Authorities differ as to the origin of the present name. Some say it is a corruption of "Arizuma," first given to the country by the early Spanish explorers. Some claim it is a Mohave Indian word signifying "Blessed Sun," from "Ara," meaning "blessed," and "Zuma," "sun." Others think it is of Pima origin and means "Little Creek," while there is authority that its derivation is from two Pima words, "Ari," a maiden, and "Zon," a valley. Other authorities hold that it is a compound of the two Latin words "Aridus" and "Zona," aridus, dry from "aero," to be dry; zona simply means a girdle or belt. This derivation would produce a word meaning "a dry or parched belt of country." The nomenclature of the counties of this state is mostly of Spanish derivation and can be found in the Blue Book. These were prepared originally by Win J. Davis for the first edition of the Blue Book, in the labor of the preparation of which I assisted. "Thema," a literary journal published and edited by Mr. Davis and myself from 1889 to 1894, contained many valuable historical articles that can not be found elsewhere.