

# History of Alta California Pre-Rancho Era

## BACKGROUND



**An Ohlone village.** Source: Santa Cruz Museum of Natural History.

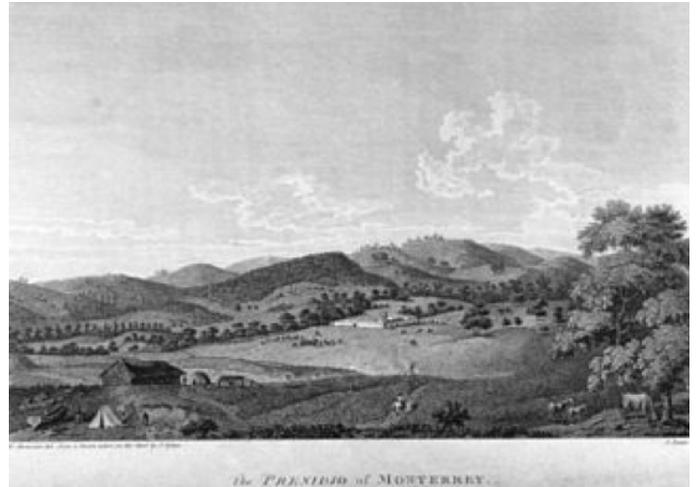
A long time ago Santa Cruz County was the home of many tribelets of the Ohlone people. One of those tribelets was the Calendaruc [Ka-linta Ruk] people and they inhabited the land that is now occupied by Rancho San Andrés. Calendaruc means “ocean houses,” which describes their location on the land. Descendants of these people continue to live here today.

The native people thrived in this area using the things nature provided. They cultivated the land to produce for them by burning specific areas to improve the growth of the grasslands. In these places, they harvested seeds and materials for baskets. The improved growth attracted animals such as elk, deer and antelope that they hunted. The Calendaruc people also ate berries, acorns and other tree nuts. In the wetlands, they used nets to hunt ducks and geese, and harvested reeds to make houses and boats.

The 50 tribelets had an economic system and used shell beads as money to purchase items from other neighboring villages. Each village had a specific territory and leadership within the village which included rank and status. Over 250 years ago, things changed for the native people with the arrival of the Spanish. The lives of native people were severely altered by the introduction of the Spanish mission system. Their way of life was changed and many were brought to the missions against their will. Many people died from the diseases introduced by the Spanish. The native people were the workers at the missions, constructing the buildings, tending to the cattle, and caring for the crops and orchards. They continued this role into the Rancho period.

Why did the Spanish come? They were given a job to find land for Spain, to convert native people to Catholicism, and to send gold and other valuables back home to Spain. The Spanish did this in Florida, South America, the Philippines and Central America. They built near local tribes and brought the native people to the missions to work and be converted to Catholicism. In Mexico, the Spanish conquered the Aztecs and took control of much of Mexico. Baja California, Texas and what is now the Southwestern United States, including California, were part of Spain.

The mission period only lasted about 60 years, from 1770 until 1834 when Mexico, which had separated from Spain (the Mexican War for Independence lasted from 1810-1821), ended the mission period through what is called secularization. By this time the Ohlone people had become dependent upon the missions, and this new freedom caused problems. They had no land to go back to, their way of living had been completely upset and they ended up working for the Californios who were now ranchers. Some Ohlones worked as servants, others became vaqueros at the ranchos. Some were considered outlaws and hunted down and punished or murdered.



**The Presidio of Monterey in the early 1800s. Monterey was the capital of Alta California under both Spain and Mexico.** Source: *A Voyage of Discovery to the North Pacific Ocean and Round the World* by Captain George Vancouver

Not all people who traveled to Alta California in the 1770s were missionaries. Some were soldiers assigned to the four presidios built along the Alta California coast. The first one in San Diego (1769), the second one in Monterey (1770), the third in San Francisco (1776) and the fourth one in Santa Barbara (1782). The presidios were like forts whose purpose was to protect the nearby missions. Additionally, there were three

## — LESSON ONE CONTINUED —

towns developed in Alta California by the Spanish. The first was Pueblo San Jose (1777), the second Pueblo Los Angeles (1781), and the third and last pueblo Villa de Branciforte (1797) in what is now the Eastside of Santa Cruz. These towns were secular, meaning they didn't have the same purpose as the missions. The pueblos were towns where merchants, farming and ranching was important. The sale and trading of tallow and hides became a very important industry for the pueblos as well as the missions and later the ranchos.

Alta California had missions, presidios, pueblos and ranchos.

After the War of Independence from Spain (1810-1821), the Mexican government ruled what we call California. The Mexican people no longer wanted to be ruled by Spain and were proud to be independent of Spain. Today this is celebrated as Mexican Independence Day on September 16.

### ACTIVITIES

1. Write a story about what you think it would have been like to be an Ohlone living in this area at the time the Spanish came to this area and started the Santa Cruz Mission.
2. Draw a picture showing Ohlones using tule in their everyday life.
3. The Ohlones were famous for making the best baskets. Do research online and find a picture of an Ohlone basket. Draw and color a picture of an Ohlone basket.
4. Write a letter to the King of Spain explaining what life was like at Mission Santa Cruz. In particular, describe the kinds of work that was being done at your mission. Research to be sure you have correct information for the years before secularization (1791-1830).