



Newsletter
September
2025

CALIFORNIA

The recently passed September 9th marked the 175th anniversary of the creation of the place now home to nearly 40 million of us – California. It went by largely unnoticed, un-talked about, and un-celebrated. Maybe partially due to today's practice of moving all anniversary dates to the nearest convenient Monday, these dates lose their historical significance and become merely another long weekend. Not that there's anything wrong with a nice long holiday weekend, but what's the actual holiday all about? I think a little retrospection is called for to reignite our appreciation for this important date. As important as the birth of the State of California was, there was much going on here before becoming the 31st star added to our flag in 1851 (below).



The first Californians migrated here from somewhere else (didn't we all?) during the last ice age, some 13-15,000 years ago. At that time,

the coastline was about 25 miles further out into the Pacific Ocean. Here they settled until higher river levels and rising ocean waters pushed them eastward (inland) to warmer and drier homes.



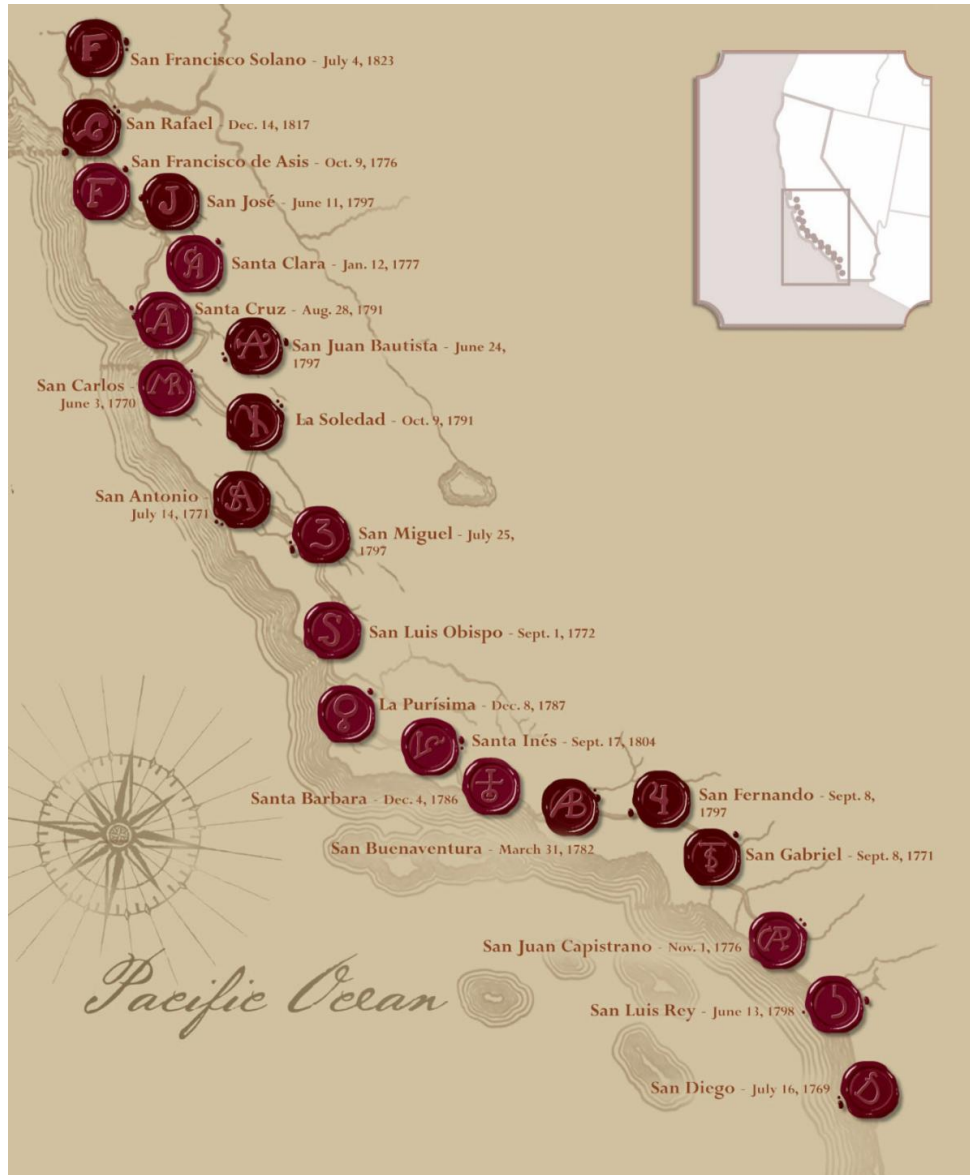
By the time Spanish explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo (above) arrived in 1542, the native population is thought to have been between 150,000 and 750,000, possibly higher, but nobody really bothered to count.

For the next 200 years or so, the area was largely ignored by Spain, believing there really wasn't much of anything here worth exploiting.

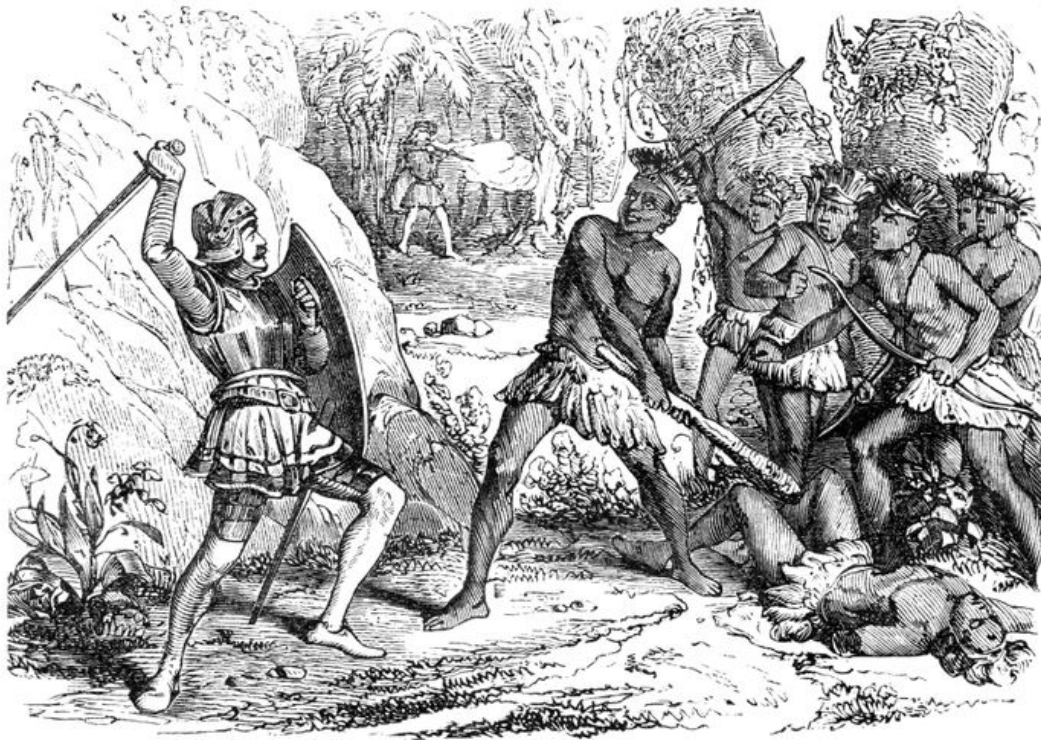


California, at one time, was thought to be an island.

The early 1770's saw the introduction of the mission system (below) along the El Camino Real which was the main travel route between San Diego and San Francisco.



There was no real exploration of inland valleys or mountains except for occasional forays by soldiers to retrieve runaway malcontents from the missions.



Soldier attempting to capture natives.

Eventually the mission system collapsed, and in 1821, Mexico won its independence from Spain. Mexico, too, saw the area (called Alta California) largely as a wasteland and used it as a dumping ground for exiles and undesirables of all sorts.



Mexican Bandit

Slowly these unwanted citizens formed small pueblos and Ranchos, mainly raising cattle and exporting hides, tallow, and beef.



Mexican vaqueros capturing wild beef.

Mexico ceded California to the United States upon losing the war in 1848, still believing the area to be largely worthless.



Abandoned buildings from the Mexican period.

However, in 1848, BINGO. Everything changed with the discovery of a tiny gold nugget at John Sutter's mill in Coloma (below).



Although not the first gold rush the United States had known, it was certainly the best publicized and launched a huge migration of gold seekers and settlers from the world over. 49ers at work (below).



By 1850, the population had swelled to about 225,000. By contrast, an 1847 map lists the population at 755! This does NOT include women, or non-Europeans of either sex. Spanish, although European, were also NOT included as they were non-voters. Fear rose in Washington that California might form an independent country depriving the government of all that beautiful tax money. The statehood push went into overdrive, and California joined only a very few States that had never been an organized U.S. Territory first. On September 9, 1850, California became the 31st State cementing the U.S. foothold on the West Coast.



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United States in 1850.

The date became known as Admission Day and was a statewide holiday, generally marking the end of summer vacation and the beginning of the dreaded school year.



The first State capitol was the Pueblo San Jose, 1849-1851



Followed by Vallejo, 1852-1853



Benecia, 1853-1854



And Sacramento from 1854 onto today. Above is the original Capitol Building.

After an extremely violent, divisive, and corrupt beginning, California has emerged as an economic powerhouse leading the world in agriculture and technology. (World famous California grapes, below.)



Ever controversial, even today some Californians favor dividing the State (proposed split below).



Others favor seceding from the Union altogether and forming an

autonomous nation of our own.

We'll see what the next 175 years brings.

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SCCBF is funded primarily by public contributions and memberships. If you have an interest in preservation, history, or are looking to be involved in the community, email INFO@SCCBF.org.

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SCCBF's current renovation project is the Historic Sutter Creek Grammar School which is rich in Gold Rush history. This beautiful building is California's second oldest two-story brick schoolhouse. There are four rooms within the Historic Grammar School that can be rented. Contact the City of Sutter Creek

for information on rates and availability - (209) 267-5647 ext. 230 or email info@cityofsuttercreek.org / website - cityofsuttercreek.org

The Sutter Creek Community Benefit Foundation (SCCBF) is dedicated to the restoration, preservation, and development of the community's historic assets both now and for future generations. (nonprofit 501(c)3 – Tax ID #87-1825043)

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