From Rancho to Reservoir:

History and Archaeology of the
Los Vaqueros Watershed, California

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Cover illustration: Mary Ferrario sits with Evelyn Bonfante and a friend on a Vasco hillside, ca. 1917.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface

## CHAPTER 1. AN INTRODUCTION TO LOS VAQUEROS

The Changing Countryside
What is the Los Vaqueros Project and Why are We Writing this Report?
The Los Vaqueros Watershed
An Introduction to the Cultural History of the Watershed
Los Vaqueros on the Eve of Settlement

FOCUSED ESSAYS:
- Reservoirs and Historic Preservation: The Legal Framework
- Preserving the Past: Cultural Resources Management at Los Vaqueros
- A Different Place: The Prehistoric Landscape
- Early Residents of Los Vaqueros
- The Ways and Means of History and Archaeology

## CHAPTER 2. DISPUTED RANGE:
RANCHING A MEXICAN LAND GRANT UNDER U.S. RULE, 1844-1880

The Ranchos
Rancho Cañada de Los Vaqueros—The Valley of the Cowboys
California’s Changing Range Land
Los Vaqueros Changes Too

FOCUSED ESSAYS:
- The Hapless Rancheros
- Battle Royale: Forty Years of Fighting in the Courts and on the Range
- Fencing the Land
- The Suñols and Their Adobe
- Domesticating the Grant: Women and Children on the Ranching Frontier
- The Enterprising Bascos
- A Life-History of the Vasco Adobe
- A Good Loaf of Bread
- Elegant Dining on California’s Cattle Frontier
- The Rivals, Part I: Louis Peres, A Fighter to the End
- The Rivals, Part II: Simon Blum, Litigant Extraordinare
- Outlaws in the Vasco: The Legend of Joaquin Murieta
- Los Vaqueros, The Cowboys
# CHAPTER 3. PARCELING THE LAND: FAMILY FARMS ON PUBLIC LANDS AND TENANTED LEASEHOLDS, 1870-1935

Grain Farming and Homesteading 79  
Los Vaqueros Parceled 81  
A Pattern of Persistence 83  
Life at Los Vaqueros, into the 20th Century 84  

**FOCUSED ESSAYS:**  
“Farmers Who Ranched, Ranchers Who Farmed”: Agricultural Work in Los Vaqueros 87  
The Black Hills 92  
Community, Memory, and Marginality: Fermin Valenzuela and Andrew Lindholm 96  
Charles McLaughlin, Railroad Baron 100  
Sticks and Stones: Building in Los Vaqueros 103  
The Bonfante Ranch Then and Now 108  
Immigrants and Neighbors: The Bordes, Cabral, Fragulia, and Grueninger Families 113  
Other Peoples Business: Social Networking in Los Vaqueros 118  
A Most Public-Spirited Lady: Mary Crocker 123  
Farm Women and Children 125  
John Bonfante’s Blacksmith Shop 129  
Bocce to Baseball: Folklife and Ethnicity in the Vasco 134  
Social Events in Los Vaqueros: Rituals of Transition, Solidarity, and Togetherness 137  
All About Artifacts: The Archaeology of the Roses’ Stream and the Connollys’ Cellar 142

# CHAPTER 4. FULL CIRCLE: LOS VAQUEROS FROM 1929 TO THE PRESENT

Land Sales 148  
Contra Costa Water District 149  
Time’s Cycle 151  

**FOCUSED ESSAYS:**  
Caterpillars and Cows: The Life and Times of Oscar Starr 152  
Edith Ordway, “A Real Cowgirl” 154  
Graham Nissen: Innovation Versus Tradition 155  
The Evolution of a Road 157  

Notes 160  
References 170
ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS FROM THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES CENTER (ASC), SONOMA STATE UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC FOUNDATION, INC. (SSUAF), HAVE BEEN STUDYING CULTURAL RESOURCES IN THE LOS VAQUEROS PROJECT AREA SINCE 1980. THE PURPOSE OF THIS VOLUME IS TO SYNTHESIZE MORE THAN A DECADE’S WORTH OF HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH PERFORMED FOR THE CONTRA COSTA WATER DISTRICT’S (CCWD) LOS VAQUEROS PROJECT. THE RESEARCH WAS CONDUCTED IN COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS, WITH THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION ACTING AS THE LEAD FEDERAL AGENCY. MUCH OF THIS INFORMATION HAS BEEN PRESENTED IN A MORE ACADEMIC FORMAT IN THE PROJECT’S MANY TECHNICAL REPORTS. THIS WELL-ILLUSTRATED VOLUME IS INTENDED TO SYNTHESIZE THE INFORMATION AND TO PRESENT IT IN A WAY THAT A WIDER AUDIENCE WILL FIND INTERESTING.

THE TEXT IS DIVIDED INTO FOUR CHAPTERS, ARRANGED MORE-OR-LESS CHRONOLOGICALLY. EACH CHAPTER INCLUDES A STRAIGHTFORWARD NARRATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE PERIOD, FOLLOWED BY A SERIES OF ESSAYS FOCUSED ON TOPICS RELEVANT TO THAT TIME PERIOD. EACH OF THE ESSAYS CAN STAND ALONE, BUT IS MORE MEANINGFUL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE VOLUME OVERVIEWS. BY THE SAME TOKEN, A READER COULD GET A CAPSULE HISTORY OF LOS VAQUEROS JUST BY READING THE OVERVIEWS.

AUTHORSHIP

THIS VOLUME IS A TRULY COLLABORATIVE EFFORT WRITTEN BY ASC STAFF MEMBERS WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE LOS VAQUEROS PROJECT IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES OVER THE YEARS. PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH OF THE FOCUSED ESSAYS WAS ASSIGNED TO ONE OF THE CONTRIBUTORS; THEIR JOB WAS TO SYNTHESIZE EXISTING DATA IN A FRIENDLY WRITING STYLE. AUTHORSHIP HAS NOT BEEN CREDITED ESSAY-BY-ESSAY BECAUSE WE ALL BORROWED FROM ONE ANOTHER AS WELL AS FROM PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED PROJECT MATERIAL. AS VOLUME EDITOR, I HAVE ALSO TAKEN LIBERTIES MOVING INFORMATION AROUND, WITH THE RESULT THAT IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO ASSIGN PRIMARY AUTHORSHIP TO SOME OF THE ESSAYS. NONETHELESS, EACH ESSAY WAS DRAFTED BY AN INDIVIDUAL AUTHOR, AND CREDIT IS DUE.


KARANA HATTERSLEY-DRAYTON IS THE PROJECT ORAL HISTORIAN; SHE EARNED HER MASTER’S IN FOLKLORE FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY. FROM 1992 THROUGH 1996 KARANA CONDUCTED MORE THAN TWO DOZEN INTERVIEWS WITH PREVIOUS RESIDENTS OF LOS VAQUEROS AND THEIR FAMILIES. SHE HAS ALSO COMPILED AN ARCHIVE OF HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS, WHICH HAS BEEN HEAVILY MINED FOR THIS REPORT. KARANA WAS PRIMARILY RESPONSIBLE FOR FOCUSED ESSAYS ON JOAQUIN MURIETA, THE BLACK HILLS, FOUR IMMIGRANT FARM FAMILIES, FOLKLORE AND ETHNICITY, WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE LATE 19TH CENTURY, FERMIN VALENZUELA AND ANDREW LINDHOLM, EDDIE ORDUÑA, AND GRAHAM NISSEN. IN ADDITION, SHE CONTRIBUTED TO THE ESSAY ON RESEARCH METHODS.
Elaine-Maryse Solari is a Historical Researcher for the Los Vaqueros Project. She has a Master’s degree in Cultural Resources Management from SSU and is a member of the State Bar of California. Elaine-Maryse has been combing the archives for primary-source material on the inhabitants of Los Vaqueros since 1993. With a Juris Doctor from Santa Clara University, her specialty is the law and she has made a major contribution toward understanding the complicated legal maneuverings of the Los Vaqueros title chain. Elaine-Maryse was primarily responsible for focused essays on land feuds and court battles, Louis Peres, Simon Blum, and Oscar Starr.

Bright Eastman is another Historical Researcher for the Los Vaqueros Project; she is currently working on her Master’s degree in Cultural Resources Management at SSU. Bright’s research has focused on agricultural technology, farm buildings, and 20th-century social networks on the Vasco. Her writing responsibilities for the current volume included women and children during the ranching period, social networking and social events, Vasco architecture, and agricultural work.

Suzanne Stewart is the ASC’s Staff Editor; she is also a fully trained archaeologist with a Master’s degree in Cultural Resources Management from SSU and is a member of SOPA. Suzanne has participated in report preparation for most of the Los Vaqueros publications and was involved in some of the early field surveys. In addition to editing the current volume, she drafted focused essays on the legal framework of the investigations, ethnohistory, prehistory, the Alvisos, the Bascos, Charles McLaughlin, and Mary Crocker.

I (Grace Ziesing) am a Staff Historical Archaeologist with a Master’s degree in Archaeology from Boston University; I am also a member of SOPA. I have been involved with the Los Vaqueros Project since 1994 when I analyzed and wrote up the artifacts for three historical sites excavated in 1993. In 1994 and again in 1995 I directed excavations at four historical sites, including the Vasco Adobe. Following excavation, I wrote the technical reports for all four sites. My primary responsibility for the current volume has been to coordinate writing and compile the chapters. In addition, my writing responsibilities were the four chapter overviews and focused essays on Cultural Resources Management, research methods, the Suñol and Vasco adobes, dining and breadmaking at the Vasco Adobe, Peres’s fence, cowboys, the Bonfante site overview and blacksmith shop, refuse deposits at the Connolly and Rose sites, and Vasco Road.

Sources

The information synthesized in this report was gathered over the last decade, and much of it has been published in other, more technical formats. Reports relied on most heavily include the following:

Mary Praetzellis, Suzanne B. Stewart, and Grace H. Ziesing

Mary Praetzellis, Grace Ziesing, Jack McIlroy, Adrian Praetzellis
Grace H. Ziesing

Grace H. Ziesing

In an effort to avoid weighing down the text with detailed references, sources have been footnoted in topical groups where appropriate. Fact-by-fact sourcing can be found in the technical reports listed above or referred to throughout the volume. Suggestions for further reading have been limited to sources readily available in most public libraries.

**Acknowledgments**

I think that all of us who have been involved in the Los Vaqueros Project are grateful for the research opportunities it has afforded us. For these we have CCWD and the Bureau of Reclamation to thank—they have taken their responsibility to preserve the past for future generations seriously and have given us every possible chance to make the most of what Los Vaqueros has to offer. Janice Hutton of CCWD has expertly overseen the administration of our contract with CCWD, and has been flexible with scheduling adjustments when they were most needed. Terry Cox, CCWD’s Watershed Manager, made sure the field efforts went smoothly and provided us with storage for our equipment. The Bureau of Reclamation, as the lead Federal agency for the Project, has been closely involved in the development and implementation of the cultural resources mitigation program from the outset.

County officials, archivists, and librarians have all been extremely helpful in facilitating our research efforts. Special thanks go to the following (in no particular order): Betty Maffei (Director) and volunteers at the Contra Costa County History Center in Pleasant Hill; Barbara Chambers (Assistant County Recorder) and Robert Westby (former Records Manager) at the Office of the Clerk-Recorder for Contra Costa County in Martinez; the staff of the Brentwood Museum who opened their doors to us and allowed us to copy their collection of historic photographs; Dave Smith (Secretary and Treasurer) at the Antique Caterpillar Machinery Owners Club; the helpful staff of St. Michaels Parish, especially Wilma and Donna; volunteers at the Livermore Heritage Guild; and the staff at the Contra Costa County Library in Pleasant Hill.

We would also like to acknowledge oral-history informants Paul Fragulia, his daughter Marie Bignone, Mary Cabral, Frances Vallerga, and Evelyn Sod, all of whom sat through multiple interviews and loaned us precious family photographs. Franklyn Silva, a gifted raconteur, also deserves special mention for the extra efforts he made to contact family members, draw maps, and write letters. He has also curated a wonderful collection of Los Vaqueros ephemera (including family photographs) and generously gave us access to it. Carol Hovey, a descendant of Pedro Altube, compiled an extensive family history that she graciously shared with us.
Several professional colleagues were also very helpful in making this study possible. Anne Homan and Kathy Leighton, both local historians, generously shared the efforts of their own work and archival holdings. Dr. Margaret Purser (Department of Anthropology, Sonoma State University) inspired the concept of social networking used in one of the essays in this volume. Thanks also to Randall Milliken for making available his genealogies based on mission-register research.

As volume editor, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to all the contributors, who cheerfully worked on a very tight schedule and made the best possible use of their time. Thanks also to Rose White, who expertly handled the illustrations and text formatting despite being in the middle of major life changes (moving and motherhood). Most of the staff members and many of the students at ASC have been involved in some aspect of the Los Vaqueros Project, and they all deserve acknowledgment, but that, of course, would be an unwieldy list. So let me single out Mary and Adrian Praetzellis, who have provided encouragement and countless research opportunities to all of us. Dave Fredrickson has been an inspiration throughout the Los Vaqueros Project, and, although officially retired, continues to preside over our meetings and offer modulated words of wisdom.

Finally, we must also acknowledge all the people of the Vasco, past and present, who made the watershed the fascinating place that we have tried to evoke in these pages. For those who have passed into history, we hope our effort resurrects them from the dusty archives. For those who contributed their knowledge through oral history, we can only hope that this volume provides a broader context for their own very personal experiences of Los Vaqueros. The watershed itself is a unique and wonderful place and, for battle-weary academics and career archaeologists, a true respite from the trials of everyday life. I, for one, relished my time amid the ruins of the Vasco, and will miss it when it is inundated.

Grace H. Ziesing  
Oakland, California  
April 1997
CHAPTER 1
AN INTRODUCTION TO LOS VAQUEROS

THE CHANGING COUNTRYSIDE

To look at the hills and valleys of Los Vaqueros now, one is impressed by how untouched the land seems. It appears to be a landscape stuck in time, refreshingly free from the agricultural and residential development that surrounds it on all sides. It is hard to imagine that very much has changed here over the course of the centuries. But, of course, like every inch of California, Los Vaqueros has countless stories to tell—one for each man, woman, and child who ever lived there, and one for each day, month, or year that has passed.

Thousands of years ago the valley was a different place, with more diverse plant life including madrone and big-leaf maple. Then, native people used it as a hunting area and seasonal home where they raised their families and buried their dead. After about 400 years ago, people spent less time in the valley. Finally, at the end of the 18th century, the Spanish arrived, bringing with them unfamiliar diseases and an intriguing but culturally devastating mission system. Within a few decades of European arrival, Los Vaqueros had become mission grazing land, largely unpopulated and unused.

Change came slowly to Los Vaqueros, and when ownership was finally granted to three Mexican citizens, the shift in its legal status barely made a mark on the landscape. Development of the land was gradual: a mud-brick house here and there, corrals, and stream diversions. And then fences went up, marking a profound shift in how the land could be used. Suddenly, this was private property, and the pace of change quickened. What had been wide-open grazing land was

Kellogg Creek Valley. View of the Los Vaqueros Project area shot from a hill at the north end of Kellogg Creek Valley, looking south. Note the meanders of Kellogg Creek and the native oaks dotting the landscape.
broken up into smaller tenant farms that people cultivated or ranched. The population grew markedly and a rural community, with a school of its own, developed.

For half a century, families—many of them recent immigrants from Europe—lived off the land of Los Vaqueros. Here, cash-poor farmers could make use of large tracts of land without the capital they would need to buy their own acreage. But just when the nation was plunged into the Great Depression, the benevolent landowner died tragically, and her estate eventually sold the land out from under the tenants. Smaller tenant farms were consolidated into larger ranches, and rather than paving the way for development, this move helped preserve the land as open space, once again perfect for grazing livestock.

The area we call Los Vaqueros has been known by many names over the years—names that reflect both the changing landscape and the people who used it. We will never know what the Native Americans called their valley, and the earliest Spanish explorers did not describe it. But later, when the mission fathers used the hills and valleys at the foot of Mount Diablo to graze their massive herds of cattle, it became known as Poso de los Vaqueros, or “Cowboys’ Spring.” After the missions closed their doors and the Mexican government granted the land to three Mexican brothers-in-law, it was appropriately given the official name of Cañada de los Vaqueros, or “Valley of the Cowboys.” Some of the earliest cattle ranchers in the valley were Basques from the French and Spanish Pyrenees, and the name that stayed with the land well into this century—The Vasco, or The Basco—was derived from their tenure there. Other names are purely geographical, used to describe different parts of the area: Kellogg Creek Valley and the Black Hills.

But whatever you call it, Los Vaqueros has remained a place that appears to be stuck in time. Ironically, it is this very aspect that set the stage for the biggest landscape change of all, which, as of this writing, is still to come. The sleepy valley will be flooded within the next decade. Lest we forget the generations of Californians that have left this place behind, we will try to tell some of their stories.

WHAT IS THE LOS VAQUEROS PROJECT, AND WHY ARE WE WRITING ABOUT IT?

In 1937 citizens of Contra Costa County voted to establish the Contra Costa Water District (CCWD), to be responsible for insuring that public water supply would always be available. The Contra Costa Canal, which takes water from the San Joaquin River, was completed in 1948 as part of the Bureau of Reclamation’s Central Valley Project. While the canal assured access to water, saline levels are unacceptably high at times. The Los Vaqueros Project seeks to address this problem and provide emergency storage by constructing a new water-intake point further upriver in addition to a reservoir of fresh water to be tapped in times of high salinity.

The project has several components that will affect the landscape: the reservoir pool itself will flood approximately 1,500 acres of the valley. The dam for the reservoir will be 192 feet high and require almost 3 million cubic yards of fill, much of it from the valley floor below. Utilities and transportation infrastructure located in the valley have already been moved in anticipation of the flooding—this includes four gas and petroleum pipelines, electrical lines, and the north-south Vasco Road traveled by thousands of commuters every day.
Chapter 1/An Introduction to Los Vaqueros

The hills at the north end of the valley are graded while soil is mined from the valley floor to construct the 192-foot dam that will hold back the waters of the new reservoir. (Photograph courtesy Jack Meyer.)

Construction of Los Vaqueros Dam, 1996.

The new water pipeline—big enough for the tallest person to walk through, upright—will run 20 miles, all of it buried. Side-by-side trenches, twice as wide as the pipe itself, are being dug across the hills and valleys surrounding the Los Vaqueros watershed to accommodate the new pipeline.

All told, the Los Vaqueros Project will affect more than 16,000 acres of land—land that is home to a diverse array of wildlife and plants, land that generations of natives and immigrants alike have traversed, subsisted on, and occupied for the past 10,000 years. For this reason, the Los Vaqueros Project has to be more than just an engineering project, and CCWD has enthusiastically seized the opportunity to supply the community with much more than clean water. Countless professionals, including archaeologists, historians, and biologists, have been hired to make numerous studies to minimize the effects of the Los Vaqueros Project on the natural and cultural environment. As a result of these studies, precious plant and animal life will be relocated or the project will be redesigned around it, and the cumulative cultural history of this little-developed inland valley will be thoroughly examined, synthesized, and recorded so that anyone with an interest can read about it. It is hoped that, while the face of the landscape will be changed forever, something tangible about Los Vaqueros will be preserved for the ages.

This volume presents the results of one aspect of the cultural resources studies, that is, the history of Los Vaqueros. Much of the data used here has been presented in technical reports intended for professional audiences and resource managers. These reports satisfy the letter of the law, but CCWD has taken its responsibility one step further by supporting volumes like this, intended to present the information in a format that is accessible to the general public. We hope to capture something of the diverse heritage of Los Vaqueros and its generations of people, and communicate it effectively to a wide audience. This volume focuses mostly on the history of Los
Vaqueros after control of California was ceded to the United States by the Mexican government in 1848. Earlier periods and peoples are alluded to, but readers interested in in-depth studies of Native Americans at Los Vaqueros are referred to other published reports. 

THE LOS VAQUEROS WATERSHED

The hills and valleys of Los Vaqueros are a rural outpost surrounded by the bustling suburban developments of the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta communities to the north and Livermore Valley’s I-580 corridor to the south. From the Livermore Valley, Vasco Road climbs into the low hills on the north side of I-580 and wends its way between the hilltops into the Los

**Project Location.** The Los Vaqueros Project is located mostly in southeastern Contra Costa County, although a small portion crosses over into northeastern Alameda County. It is approximately 15 miles south of Antioch and 25 miles west of Stockton. Mount Diablo, whose summit is about 10 miles northwest of the watershed, dominates the surrounding landscape, although it cannot be seen from the valley floor.
VAQUEROS WATERSHED ABOUT 6 MILES OUT. THE LANDSCAPE CHANGES AS SOON AS THE ROAD CRESTS THE FIRST HILL, AND, FOR A MOMENT, THE UNDEVELOPED RANCH LAND ALL AROUND EVOKES A FEELING OF NOSTALGIA FOR AN EARLIER CALIFORNIA. FOR THE NEXT 15 MILES THERE ARE NO SUBDIVISIONS, NO TRAFFIC LIGHTS, NO SHOPPING MALLS. INSTEAD, RAMSHACKLE FENCES LINE THE ROADWAY, STOCK PONDS NESTLE IN SMALL VALLEYS, AND FARMSTEADS—SPREAD OUT EVERY MILE OR SO—are arranged as clusters of wood and stucco buildings at the ends of long, unpaved drives.


THE WATERSHED’S NATURAL SETTING


THE CLIMATE OF THIS INLAND VALLEY AND ITS SURROUNDING HILLS IS TYPICALLY MEDITERRANEAN, WITH WET WINTERS THAT ARE MILD TO MODERATELY COLD, ALTERNATING WITH HOT, DRY SUMMERS. CHARACTERISTIC OF THE HILL COUNTRY IN THIS REGION ARE THE HIGH WINDS, WHICH ARE PARTICULARLY DISAGREEABLE IN WINTER MONTHS. THE PROTECTED VALLEY OF LOS VAQUEROS WAS FAVORED BY EARLY STOCKRAISERS, WHO RAN THEIR CATTLE HERE TO GET OUT OF THE WINDS, WHILE THE ROCKSHELTERS AT VASCO CAVES AND ELSEWHERE IN THE UPLANDS SERVED THE SAME PURPOSE FOR BOTH HUMANS AND THEIR STOCK. ANOTHER CLIMATIC TRAIT THAT SHAPED THE LAND USE IN THE AREA WAS ITS ARIDITY: ABOUT 90 PERCENT OF THE ANNUAL PRECIPITATION OCCURS FROM NOVEMBER THROUGH APRIL, WITH SEASONAL AVERAGES VARYING FROM ABOUT 13 INCHES IN THE EAST TO 17 INCHES IN THE WEST. IN THE SUMMER AND FALL, FORAGE IS SPARSE AND PASTURE NEARLY NONEXISTENT. WHILE DRY-FARMING WAS AN ECONOMICALLY VISIBLE ENTERPRISE IN SOME PORTIONS OF THE WATERSHED, IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE—EVEN SMALL TRUCK GARDENS—COULD NOT BE SUPPORTED.

central and western parts, while patches of chaparral are found along the western boundary. A riparian plant community, including tules and cottonwoods, lines the principal drainages. The area may have been a considerably more wooded environment prior to the intensive grazing and logging activities of the 1850s and 1860s. Much of the watershed, however, is rockland—ranging from areas with only thin soils overlying bedrock to huge outcrops that extend for a mile or more along ridgelines.

The convergence of habitat types provides for a wide diversity of animal life in the Los Vaqueros watershed. The vast grasslands are home to birds, mammals, amphibians, and reptiles such as ground squirrels, tree frogs, gopher snakes, burrowing owls, skunks, foxes, coyotes, and meadowlarks, to name a few. Raptors such as the western screech owl, American kestrel, and red-tailed hawk feed on small grassland mammals and soar the currents that sweep up from the

*Los Vaqueros Watershed.* This topographic rendering of the Los Vaqueros Project area shows the natural valley that will be filled with the waters of the new reservoir. (*Adapted by Greg White from U.S.G.S. topographical maps.*)
valley floor. Spring shoots attract black-tailed deer. Various wetland habitats—streams, stock ponds, marshes, vernal pools, and intermittent pools that form amongst the many rock outcrops—provide sustenance for all manner of plant and animal life including the increasingly rare fairy shrimp and California tiger salamander. Patches of chaparral in the uplands of the watershed are home to the threatened Alameda whipsnake, while stands of oak provide nesting sites for golden eagles and red-tailed hawks.

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF THE WATERSHED

The ready availability of water, the protective barrier of the surrounding hills, and the natural rock outcrops that dot the hills of the Los Vaqueros area have been magnets for humans for centuries. Indeed, Los Vaqueros has a venerable history of human occupation. Archaeological evidence of human activity stretches back almost 10,000 years, which places Los Vaqueros among some of the earliest known sites in California. Over the next 9,000-some years, the watershed continued to be used by Native American populations, sometimes intensively. Curiously, the area appears not to have been occupied much after 400 years ago, or at least there is little evidence to suggest it.

In any case, an entirely new order of change came to Native Americans in the Los Vaqueros watershed at the very end of the 18th century, when Spanish missionaries encroached on the land. The disruption was so great that most of the people who lived in the area moved to Missions San Francisco (Dolores) and San Jose between 1803 and 1806. Much of what occurred is poorly understood because nearly a century would pass before the first systematic ethnographic work was conducted in California.

Mission San Jose, founded in 1797, was the largest population center in the region in the early 19th century. Beginning as the dominant institution to change the lives of native peoples of the East Bay and the Central Valley, the mission and later the Pueblo of San Jose became the center of political, social, and religious life for the Californios (Californians of Hispanic heritage) in the region. Under the Spanish, mission land use did not extend far inland, and the Los Vaqueros vicinity, having been used intermittently by the Native American populations and not yet settled by the Europeans, remained largely unoccupied. Beginning in 1821 under the Mexican regime, new settlements cropped up to maintain the mission system—some of them very near the Los Vaqueros watershed.

The Livermore, San Ramon, and Diablo valleys became vast grazing tracts for the livestock of Mission San Jose. An 1824 sketch map of the mission’s lands shows two outstations in the Livermore Valley and two in the Diablo Valley. In addition, the map shows a village—Arroyo de los Poblanos—on Marsh Creek, very near Kellogg Creek. At that time, the lands that were to become Los Vaqueros were used for rodeo (or round-up) of mission cattle; the area was then known as Poso de los Vaqueros—“Spring of the Cowboys,” or “Cowboys’ Spring.”

The California missions were secularized between 1835 and 1836 and their lands, which were supposed to have gone to the Indians, instead opened up for settlement through grants from the Mexican government. The area surrounding Los Vaqueros was soon claimed, but Los Vaqueros itself remained surplus. When Mission San Jose had closed its doors in 1836, its nearly 2,000 Indian neophytes had to find their own means of support. Many of the most recent arrivals from
the Central Valley returned to their old villages, and some of these groups took to raiding herds of horses to the west. Increasing violence incurred by Mexican reprisals discouraged settlement of lands adjacent to the San Joaquin Valley, including what was to become Los Vaqueros.³

LOS VAQUEROS ON THE EVE OF SETTLEMENT

Throughout the late 1830s Los Vaqueros remained unclaimed land and was used by surrounding rancheros for communal grazing, as it had been earlier for the mission herds. The unfenced hills were considered public and there were no restrictions on who could run cattle there.⁴ As in the mission days, round-ups were held to gather together the roaming cattle, brand the new calves, and distribute the animals to their rightful owners. In these years, although no one officially lived at Los Vaqueros, Mexican and Indian vaqueros continued to graze cattle in the valley.

Although still wide open and largely undeveloped, the Los Vaqueros watershed was already transformed from the landscape the Native American populations had known a century before. The grazing cattle spread the seeds of European grasses far and wide, replacing the native groundcover; their hoofs dug small furrows across the hillsides, eroding the drainages; and grazing, though not yet intensive, may have begun the process of deforestation. In the early 1840s the seeds of profound change were planted when the legal status of Los Vaqueros shifted from unclaimed land to a Mexican rancho. Thus begins the history presented in this volume.
Chapter 1/An Introduction to Los Vaqueros

RESERVOIRS AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION: THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Capturing and holding large masses of water have been of critical concern in central and southern California since the aqueducts of the early missions and the great reservoir and ditch systems of the Gold Rush. Small ponds were typically placed in drainages, while whole valleys were dammed to form reservoirs on a larger scale. These complexes unavoidably targeted the very spots most likely to contain historical buildings and prehistoric and historic archaeological sites. There was, in the 19th century, no law against such destruction. After 1906, when President Theodore Roosevelt signed the Antiquities Act, the federal government finally gave some protection to archaeological sites, requiring permits to excavate them on federal land; spectacular sites might be set aside as national monuments, but lesser ones were usually ignored.

Protecting the Past

Collecting information and artifacts from archaeological sites before flooding or grading got its first concerted government support from the Works Progress Administration, set up to provide employment and stimulate the depressed economy of the 1930s. With the main goal of keeping young men off the streets—not exploring past ways of life—the WPA efforts did little more than salvage information from major sites. Although the Historic Sites Act of 1935 provided some protection for sites of “exceptional value,” others were pushed aside. To keep the economy rolling after World War II, the federal government undertook a massive public works program that included a focus on reservoir construction. Called the River Basin Salvage Program, the archaeological component had uneven success. With minuscule funding and no proper guidelines, the process has been described—perhaps unfairly—as “the ‘quick and dirty’ run-through . . . to find the best sites for excavation.” The archaeological remains of entire pioneer towns and Native American villages were lost.

The mid-1960s—a time of new approaches on all fronts—saw the beginning of a rich and complex system by which the federal government would support preservation positively, with one of the goals “to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our na-

Sites Magnificent and Humble. Cliff Palace at Mesa Verde National Park in Colorado (left) is a spectacular archaeological site that was recognized for its research value as early as the 1880s, long before historic preservation laws were enacted. The brick tankhouse platform at the Vasco Adobe site at Los Vaqueros (right) is humble by comparison, but speaks to important research topics such as modernization in 19th-century rural California. (Cliff Palace photograph from Noble 1981, p.32; courtesy David Grant Noble.)
tion.” The regulations, and the laws that drove them, developed explicit ways in which federal and state governments and individuals could consult together over the effects of projects or the treatment of individual sites. Foremost is the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended, which created the National Register of Historic Places—the federal government’s official list of important historic properties. Under NHPA’s Section 106, Federal agencies must consider the effects of all federally funded or permitted projects on important cultural resources—that is those sites, districts, buildings, structures, and objects that are eligible for listing on the National Register. While earlier legislation had sought to preserve only national landmarks and monuments (those “exceptionally valuable” properties of the Historic Sites Act of 1935), under NHPA properties of state and even local significance may be eligible. At the same time, information from sparse archaeological deposits or humble structures may contribute to our understanding of important themes in the history of the United States.

Many cultural resources at Los Vaqueros—Oscar Starr’s metal machine shed, the Perata/Bonfante ranch, Anna Connolly’s cellar, and maybe even the Vasco Adobe, among others—would not have been studied three decades ago, a considerable loss to understanding a major way of life in late-19th- and early 20th-century California.

The Section 106 Process

The National Register of Historic Places is at the core of what cultural resources professionals refer to as “The 106 Process.” All properties listed on, or even just eligible to be listed on, the National Register and that may be affected by a federal undertaking have to be considered before the project can proceed. Buildings, sites, and districts, once identified, have to be evaluated for National Register eligibility using an explicit set of criteria detailed in the Code of Federal Regulations (Title 36, Part 60).

Once it has been determined what eligible properties may be at risk, the actual effects of the project on those properties must be assessed. Where possible, all effects determined to be adverse to the historical nature or research potential of the property are avoided or minimized. Sometimes the project plans are altered so that the historical property is avoided. More often—in the case of archaeological sites and districts—the project proceeds as planned, but only after the property has been thoroughly studied, excavated, and recorded. Such has been the case with the Los Vaqueros Project, which was determined to contain numerous properties of historical significance.

Today’s system can be slow and demanding. But it is a great advance over the River Basin Survey days, when a pair of college students set off to determine—over the course of a weekend—what to salvage as a last look at the history and prehistory of miles of river lands. Now, even the roads, maintenance buildings, caretakers’ dwellings, and other features related to constructing and operating the water systems that catalyzed some of the earliest efforts at historic preservation are considered historically significant themselves!
The people who undertake historic preservation studies required by federal and state laws are called “Cultural Resources Managers.” This may sound like obfuscating legalese, and in a way it is. No single approach can be taken because so many different topics come to bear in the study of the past. A truly effective Cultural Resources Management campaign gathers professionals from a wide variety of academic backgrounds for an interdisciplinary study. Cultural resources are, of course, anything to do with people, and a typical multi-acre study area is likely to have a long and complicated history that reaches far beyond the scope that any one well-informed professional can be expected to master. At Los Vaqueros that history stretches back almost 10,000 years, and a clear understanding of the way people lived requires study of the changing environment, dynamics of soil deposition, and local geology, not to mention a mastery of archaeological site stratigraphy, artifact recognition, and the historical context in which the more recent populations lived.

Cultural resources studies associated with the Los Vaqueros Project went on in earnest for more than 18 years, beginning in 1979 and continuing through 1997 and beyond. The Anthropological Studies Center at Sonoma State University got involved in 1981 and since then has produced more than 30 technical reports on various aspects of the project; at the same time, researchers have contributed numerous articles and papers to professional publications and meetings. A full bibliography of the reports and papers fills six closely spaced pages of text. More than 50 people with backgrounds in diverse areas of study have been involved in the project over the years as field and laboratory crew, cartographers, specialists, supervisors, managers, etc. Report authors alone number more than 20.

**Cultural Resources Management Chart.** These are some of the academic disciplines and professions that Cultural Resources Managers for the Los Vaqueros Project were trained in. Note how interconnected they all are. *(Graphic by Grace H. Ziesing.)*
One Step at a Time

How does a project of this magnitude get done? The answer, of course, is step by step. Broadly sketched, the steps are to identify what cultural resources exist within the project area, determine which ones are historically significant, and devise ways to minimize negative effects on those that are. All steps of this process require input from many professional disciplines in order to responsibly manage the cultural resources present.

The identification process itself is a massive undertaking that involves both historians and archaeologists—the former search archives and the latter walk across the landscape looking for obvious signs of human activity. Those of us who focus on historical resources (that is, sites associated with

Field and Lab Workers. To mitigate project impacts at Los Vaqueros historic sites, numerous field and laboratory skills were required. *Clockwise from upper left:* drawing a barn floor with portable grid; drafting computer graphics; one-time Vasco residents at the Vasco Adobe site for oral-history interview; sorting and identifying animal bone; conducting magnetometer survey; examining seeds.
19th- and 20th-century settlers) rely on written records, maps, and oral history to predict the locations of sites and identify what we find. Prehistoric archaeologists rely more heavily on the natural sciences, the physical environment, and geological studies to predict and identify sites. Historical sites may be marked by standing structures, alignments of stones, bits of glazed pottery, or incongruously flat spots (where building foundations might have been). Prehistoric sites may be identified by pieces of flaked or ground stone, blackened soil from intensive occupation, smooth mortar holes in bedrock outcrops, or art painted on a rockshelter wall. At Los Vaqueros, 68 sites were identified as a result of this phase of research. What is more, the entire watershed was recorded as the Los Vaqueros Historic District, which included all associated sites and isolated features.

Once a site is identified it must be evaluated for its historical significance to determine if it is important enough to be studied in detail. This involves understanding the broad context in which the site functioned. All identified sites were evaluated within the appropriate context; of the 68 sites identified, 63 were determined to have sufficient integrity and research potential to be eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. The interdisciplinary nature of the work is carried into this phase because many sources of information are necessary to understand this context. At Los Vaqueros it was not enough to search libraries and archives for information on the historic period (from the mid-1800s on), or to synthesize existing scholarship about the prehistoric period. In addition, that critical but somewhat nebulous period just before and during the era of Spanish contact had to be understood. This project required new research into early mission records and early 20th-century ethnographies to try and establish who lived at Los Vaqueros on the eve of European settlement.  

Minimizing threats to historically significant sites usually means recovering the information they contain before it is lost to the world forever. The major approaches to data recovery are further historical research, archaeological excavation, and architectural recordation. These approaches involve bringing in experts from diverse fields to help identify, interpret, and record all aspects of the site. The list of specialized areas of expertise is long, but includes architectural drawing, cartography, ceramic analysis, computer graphics, geoarchaeology (analyzing soil formation processes), obsidian hydration (dating obsidian artifacts), osteology (analyzing human bone), paleoethnobotany (identifying and analyzing seeds and other organic matter), palynology (studying pollen grains and spores), photography, phytolith analysis (identifying opal grains contained within plant cells), remote sensing, stratigraphy (analyzing the superposition of cultural and natural deposits, including soils), and zooarchaeology (identifying and analyzing bone from archaeological contexts). Specialists in all of these areas, and more, have contributed to studies of the six historic and eight prehistoric sites that have been fully investigated for the Los Vaqueros Project so far.

Our job as Cultural Resources Managers is to carry out studies that will ensure the preservation of information from the past for future generations. We cannot, nor do we wish to, hinder responsible growth and development. It is, however, our legal and ethical responsibility to make sure that progress does not irrevocably destroy access to information about how the people and places that came before us shaped the present. We use every tool at our disposal to make this a reality, and are rewarded when we hear statements like what local resident and Vasco descendent Terry Rooney said: “I was sad when they were going to build the dam. But now I am happy the history is recovered.”
A DIFFERENT PLACE: THE PREHISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Today’s visitors to the Los Vaqueros area see a very different landscape from the one of 2,000, or even 200, years ago. Clambering up hot August hillsides with only dry shrubs for shade or a handhold, or plodding step by step through winter mud across the treeless valley, archaeologists first studying the modern landscape saw a marginal setting. The Kellogg Creek drainage would have been used only occasionally, it was reasoned, until populations grew so great that all other niches were filled. Archaeological studies supported this view: artifacts found on the surface were nearly all of recent types, and occupation sites were few and simple. A moister, more nurturing climate could have existed in the past, but evidence was hidden. Finding out about past environments required recognizing that Los Vaqueros, like many places in the diverse terrain of central California, is a dynamic landscape—in fact, several landscapes assembled over a period of thousands of years.

The secret to finding prehistoric archaeological sites at Los Vaqueros is an understanding of the conditions that have changed the landscape. Landscapes are formed by the processes that remove sediments (soil, rocks, and clay) from one area and deposit them in another. Paleosols (“old soils”) are formed when sediments weather for a long period at the surface of a stable landscape. It is in periods of stability that archaeological deposits can become quite complex through the concentration of artifacts, food bone, and other discards of human activity. These deposits may be sealed over gradually, through the slow contribution of sediments borne by wind or water; they may be abruptly buried through landslide or flood; or they may be whisked away in the next erosional phase. By studying a

Prehistoric Stone Tools. These three artifacts represent the different weapons used in the Los Vaqueros area. The large stemmed specimen at top is a spear or dart tip more than 7,000 years old. The leaf-shaped specimen is a dart point less than 2,500 years old, and the narrow piece is an arrow point less than 1,000 years old. (Drawing by Julia Jarrett.)
cross section of these deposits, the history of the changing landscape can be read.

Los Vaqueros Project archaeologists found evidence of land quite different from the surface today and lifeways a good deal more complex than was originally suspected for this area. More than 40 radiocarbon dates have been obtained—some to date the archaeological finds but most to identify periods of soil stability and instability, and what it means for understanding the use of this valley and of central California as a whole.

**Early Occupation**

Ten thousand years ago—before glacial melt filled up the sea and flooded inland—the Delta was merely a series of streams, and the outlet of San Francisco Bay was a canyon. The radiocarbon dates from the archaeological excavations at Los Vaqueros show us that people began using the Kellogg Creek valley at a very early time: by about 9,800 years ago—a period archaeologists refer to as the Lower Archaic—and perhaps before. This early date came from archaeological site CA-CCO-696, a previously unknown camp that was found during construction near the base of the proposed dam. Equally old is the large obsidian spear or dart point found with the radiocarbon-dated materials; with these items were chipping and grinding tools that suggested much more than just an accidental visit into the valley. These remains were found in a paleosol at a depth of more than 3 meters (at least 10 feet); to reach it, heavy equipment had dug through more recent archaeological remains—a paleosol buried under more than 1 meter (about 3 feet) of non-cultural soil.

There are only a handful of similarly early dates from archaeological sites in central California, and most of these are in areas of more obviously distinctive resources: Borax Lake in Lake County, Buena Vista Lake in the southern San Joaquin Valley, Salt Springs Valley in the Calaveras foothills, and Clarks Flat on the Stanislaus River. Does this make the Los Vaqueros site something extra special? A site of extraordinary significance? Yes and no. The site earns much of its importance precisely because its location is mundane. It suggests that Paleoindians did not just cluster at a few marvelous spots with vast resources, but rather that they may have used the same kinds of locations that people used thousands of years later. Thus many more of these ancient sites are likely present in stream deposits and alluvial fans across California. From information contained in the sequence of soils on the valley floor, we can also propose what might have

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**MAJOR LANDFORM - SEDIMENT ASSEMBLAGES IN THE KELLOGG CREEK DRAINAGE**

Cross Section of Kellogg Creek Drainage. The surface landscape of Los Vaqueros concealed earlier landforms below.
happened to dozens (maybe even hundreds) of other archaeological sites of this period: project archaeologists identified two unstable periods that occurred between 6,600 to 5,600 years ago and 4,500 to 3,500 years ago. Any earlier, Lower Archaic-period sites along the creek in this area may have been swept away, the ground surface scoured down to that of a previous time.

**Later Occupation**

The upper paleosol at CA-CCO-696 was also eye-opening. There, under nearly a meter of soil, was an archaeological site showing all indications of full residence: hearths and possible housefloors, ceremonial objects, hunting tools, and equipment for grinding food. Also present were more than 170 human graves—a clear indication that the spot was important to the group and in regular use for a long time. Radiocarbon dates, artifact styles, and dating of obsidian items combine to tell us that this community lived here from about 3,000 to 1,500 years ago.

The inhospitable nature of the present-day landscape at Los Vaqueros—the summer and winter scenario presented above—does not fit well with the location of a village of scores of people for several generations. Clearly the location’s use as an important living site is already evidence that the environment was different. More tangible evidence was yielded by material in a buried stream channel: remnants of trees, semi-preserved because of waterlogged conditions. Today even heat-loving oaks are rare in the valley, but these ancient samples from buckeye, madrone, and big-leaf maple indicate that the valley was once home to tree species that are no longer present in the valley today. The wood samples date to 2,380 years ago, during the use of the site.

The latest period of Native American use of Kellogg Creek valley was visible on the modern surface of the valley floor. This area also saw long-term occupation, with refuse-filled pits, a housefloor, fire hearths, and human graves. Several centuries of living occurred here. The sites excavated, however, were not used in earnest after about 300 years ago—nearly a century before Spanish explorers first entered San Francisco Bay. Had the climate of the Los Vaqueros area become less agreeable? Environmental explanations are not the only ones, and there may be many reasons why the Kellogg Creek drainage was used less frequently in more recent years. What is clear, however, is that at least for some period, and at least for some people, this small drainage was of great value.
**EARLY RESIDENTS OF LOS VAQUEROS**

Who was living in the Kellogg Creek drainage 300 years ago? What group controlled the area, monitored trespass, and parcelled out resources? For some California locations, such questions are fairly easily answered. In the vicinity of Mount Diablo, however, tremendous changes occurred at the time of Spanish contact, and what is now known was only learned in recent decades. Answers come from painstaking research by scholars working with the records carefully kept by Franciscan padres at missions San Francisco and San Jose. From their research, we can say that the residents were either Volvons—a group of speakers of the Bay Miwok language who had their major villages along Marsh Creek—or Ssaoams—a group of speakers of the Costanoan language whose villages were in the Brushy Peak area east of Livermore. As ethnohistorian Randall Milliken points out, the precise boundary between these two groups cannot be drawn because of their rapid and total absorption into the mission system; those groups virtually disappeared from the landscape between 1803 and 1810 and none of them or their descendants was ever interviewed by historians. While individual Native Americans lived in the region after that time—with immediate family or as part of a ranch workforce—traditional group living in the area ended nearly 200 years ago.

**Life at Los Vaqueros**

How did people live at the Kellogg Creek sites in the years before the Spanish arrived? Only very general statements can be made, based on information from other west-central California groups who escaped the direct effects of Spanish contact. Living in multi-family tribelets (also known as village communities) of about 200 people each, they made their living hunting and gathering food and other resources from their lands. They also kept in regular contact with neighbors, trading for items not available in their home territory, and exchanging marriage partners and ideas as well as goods.

Although the climate would have been roughly similar to that of today, the area was probably more wooded before Spanish, Mexican, and American cattle-grazing and woodcutting. Scattered oaks and even some groves of trees would have provided the staple acorn, which was pounded in the bedrock mortars (“Indian grinding rocks”) found across the Los Vaqueros landscape. Tiny nutritious grass seeds collected by the thousands from the open fields could also be processed there. The patchwork nature of the Kellogg Creek watershed and environs would have presented a range of other options, which were exploited in different ways based on individual desire or seasonal need. Kellogg Creek and nearby Brushy Creek would have provided fish at various seasons, while the Los Vaqueros area was a convenient hike from the sloughs of the Delta and the Sacramento-San Joaquin River, where a variety of swift-water and stillwater fish could have been taken. On the west in the high rugged Black Hills,
chaparral species were featured, desirable to humans and also to deer and other important game. The open hills on the east offered sandstone outcrops for mile upon mile, their caves and overhangs providing shelter for an array of predators and prey. There was easy access to the Livermore Valley and its springs and fertile fields, as well as to a major trade and travel route—the Altamont Pass—that linked coast with Sierra uplands and all points in between.

Despite the diversity on hand at Los Vaqueros, Volvon and Ssaoam territory was rugged hill country overlooking the San Joaquin Valley, a dry land watered only by intermittent creeks and small springs. Village populations in these summer drought lands must have broken up and reconvened at various camps throughout the year, much in the same way that village populations did in the arid Great Basin in eastern California and Nevada. Given this varied lifestyle, there was need to coordinate how and when people used resources, their interactions with neighbors and more distant groups, and the nature and timing of the families’ seasonal moves. This was done by an individual generally referred to as a “captain” by early Spanish observers and later by ethnographers. These individuals guided rather than dictated their group’s action.

**The Sacred World of Los Vaqueros**

As with most native California groups, dances and their associated festivities were probably the main forms of communal religious expression, organized by formal secret societies of the Kuksu Cult. The dancers themselves were considered to have supernatural powers; only properly prepared individuals could touch their persons or the feathers of their capes and other regalia while they were sanctified. Dances were seen not only as acts of veneration, but also as activities that maintained an undistorted world order.

Los Vaqueros was situated in the heart of a landscape recognized by generations of native Californians as sacred, a fact that was surely of profound importance to the people who lived there. Several accounts of the creation of the world and the beings in it were taken down by ethnographers and linguists speaking with Indian people from neighboring areas in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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*Dancers at Mission San Jose, 1806.* By the end of this year, all Ssaoam and Volvon people were living at the mission. *(Courtesy Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.)*
Mount Diablo is integral to the sacred tradition of several groups, while Brushy Peak and Vasco Caves also figure in some tales; it is Falcon and Condor who create the world with its Indian people, music, food, and medicine. Rock outcrops and boulders are prominent features in one series of tales. Even the caves themselves fit into the story. According to an Indian elder from the Byron Hot Springs area, the caves in those huge outcrops were made by Coyote: "They say that when Coyote was in mourning for his son, he passed through a rock, and he left holes in the rock where he passed through eastward."

The extraordinary rock art of the Vasco Caves, in perhaps the same sandstone outcrops that figure in Native Americans’ creation stories, provides another rare glimpse into this sacred world. It is clear that the artists considered birds—probably the diverse kinds of hawks, eagles, and other raptors that soar above this windswept area—to be of great importance, as they were depicted over and over. Some fly up, others down, while at least one appears to be poised and waiting; some are lifelike creatures (one even appearing as a bird-headed human), while many are abstract forms (such as crosses) that suggest birds. Looking at the rock art with the stories of Falcon, Condor, and Prairie Hawk in mind, the pictographs might be seen as direct illustrations of some of these tales. Other shapes and figures cover the rock-art panels in a variety of colors and a wide range of diverse styles. This variety suggests that different groups—perhaps arriving from some distance and several directions—may have contributed to the art.

Very little has been recorded about how native artists executed these works or how the caves may have been used by other members of a group. One
can guess that pictograph artists or other individuals visiting the caves may have required preparation just as dancers did. One thing is clear from analysis of the rock art for the Los Vaqueros study: with a few exceptions, rock art was never considered complete, at least not by new observers of the work. Some portion of a pictograph would later be rubbed to smooth it, pecked to roughen it, or added to with new lines or figures in different colors—at times obscuring and at times enhancing the original.

The Lonely Valley

The San Francisco mission priests turned their attention to the tribelets along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay during the fall of 1794. We can be fairly certain that Ssaoam and Volvon people had heard about the goings-on across the bay before that time. In the winter of 1794-1795, they would have felt this first-hand, as their near neighbors—the Saclan from between Mount Diablo and San Francisco Bay—were encouraged to go live at the mission. They fled back home after an epidemic broke out, no doubt bringing disease with them. The priests waited until 1797, then built Mission San Jose on the southeastern bayshore. Thus Spanish outreach moved a step closer to the Los Vaqueros area. Moving to the mission was sometimes presented, and accepted, as an invitation to a better life. On other occasions Indian people were harassed to go “voluntarily,” while others were indeed rounded up and moved forcibly. Through a variety of these means, by the fall of 1806 Ssaoam and Volvon tribal culture had ceased to exist in the hills and little valleys of the Los Vaqueros Project area. Over a five-year period, from November 1801 through July 1806, 126 Ssaoams had moved to Mission San Jose and 106 Volvons had moved to Missions San Jose and San Francisco. By the fall, 88 of the Volvons and Ssaoams who had gone to San Jose were dead from an outbreak of measles at the mission. Ultimately, less than half a dozen lived to see the missions close.

Thus by the fall of 1806 the Marsh Creek and Brushy Peak areas were open for use by native groups from the San Joaquin Valley and the Delta. For the next few years members of these San Joaquin River tribelets may have gone into the empty hill country of the Los Vaqueros Project area to hunt and gather seed crops. They may also have continued the traditions surrounding the rock art at Vasco Caves. In a few years, however, they too were residing at the missions. Under the Mexican regime after 1821, Indian vaqueros from throughout central California ran cattle and sheep in the hills and valleys of the Kellogg Creek drainage as a part of the mission outpost.

The end of the mission system had been planned from the start. Under the original Spanish law and subsequent Mexican law, a mission’s Indians were to be given its lands and cattle when it closed. At the time that Mission San Jose had its properties confiscated, there were more than 1,900 Indian neophytes living in its village and its outlying ranches. But only one tiny piece of land between the Mission San Jose compound and Alameda Creek was granted to any Mission San Jose Indians. Everywhere else, the Hispanic elite families took over not only the lands, but the mission cattle herds and the tiny mission outstation buildings as well.

Some of the dispossessed Mission San Jose Indian people became house servants to Mexican families in the town of San Jose. Others would have become the caretakers, vaqueros, and laborers on the new privately owned ranches. Through all the turmoil, many former mission Indians were lost from the record. Randall Milliken has identified a few Ssaoam and Volvon descendants for the Los Vaqueros Project, but work has not been done to follow the track of the descendants into the later 19th century and the 20th century. That task would be a difficult one. For six years, from 1846 to 1852, the Catholic Church in California was in a state of disarray. Many Indian people stopped going to church. Many priests failed to keep adequate records of the births, marriages, and funerals that they did perform. Then, as the civil record-keeping of the Americans began to develop, the marginalized Indian people were often left out of early censuses. Much information is available—in family oral histories as well as archives—about Indian families that formed in the melting pot of tribal groups in the East Bay. By the time record-keeping reestablished after the Civil War, however, the paper trail for the life histories of many Indian families seems to have been lost.
THE WAYS AND MEANS OF HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Historical and archaeological research is a lot like good detective work. One must follow clues, establish verifiable evidence, and ideally solve the mystery. Far from the glamour of a Mickey Spillane novel or an Indiana Jones movie, detectives and historians spend mind-numbing hours in painstaking research, whether in a forensics lab or a computer lab. The payoff comes when the story gels and, in this case, a clearer understanding of a community like the Vasco is finally realized.

The history presented in this volume is the result of more than a decade of research and field work using professional methods learned in school or improvised from experience. Three major avenues of primary research were followed: archival research, oral history, and archaeological field work. Each of these approaches to gathering information has its own time-honored methods and makes a distinct contribution to the overall story. To reconstruct the history of the Bonfante Ranch, for example, researchers consulted archival sources (such as tax records and census data) for information, talked to family members who grew up on the site, and finally conducted an archaeological investigation.

Archival Research

Archival research is perhaps the most widely recognized avenue of historical reconstruction. The historian searches through archives for primary documents that record details of the past. These raw data must then be synthesized and interpreted. Some of the most common documents consulted

Historical Documents. These are some of the documents researchers used to reconstruct the history of Los Vaqueros. Clockwise from upper left: a photograph of a Vasco School class; a page from the county tax assessment book; Mary Crocker’s probate; Juan Suñol’s brand in the Contra Costa County register; a page from the U.S. census; and a draft of an archaeological report. Underneath all is a map of the area produced by the U.S. government’s General Land Office.
for the Los Vaqueros Project include state and federal censuses, tax assessments, property deeds, probate documents, maps, court transcripts, parish records, voter registers, city directories, and newspaper articles.

The documents used by historians provide facts about peoples’ lives, such as where they were born, what property they owned, where they lived, how much money they had, and who their children were. Some documents, such as newspaper articles, diaries, and court cases, tell us of important events in peoples’ lives and provide a glimpse of what people thought of themselves or how they were viewed by their community. Successful historians do not just take these facts at face value or string them together to form a narrative. Rather, they read between the lines, synthesizing and interpreting the data, to create a truer understanding of an individual’s or family’s life history. The more data that can be gathered, the more complete the picture.

Oral History

Oral history, “the voice of the past,” provides an important resource for the interpretation of 19th- and 20th-century archaeological sites. In theory everyone can contribute to our understanding of the past, and oral history, like historical archaeology, is thus profoundly egalitarian. To quote the late social historian Paul Thompson, oral history “gives back to the people who made and experienced history . . . a central place.”

As traditionally defined, the discipline of oral history refers to the tape-recorded, first-hand experiences of individuals who have witnessed or helped to shape history. In addition to personal experiences, most interviews also include other narratives (or oral traditions), such as family histories and local legends. Oral history creates a primary source of data. Ideally, the interview is transcribed and indexed, and a copy of the manuscript is deposited for future use in a local library or university archives.

How valid or truthful is this information? Probably as “truthful” as any other form of historical evidence. Memory is fallible and over time history is compressed, certain events remembered and others forgotten. Yet census records, minutes from meetings, and tax assessments are also problematic, and the good historian (like the detective) consistently cross-checks all sources of information. The unique gift of oral history is that it allows people to talk back. Thus the rancher, miner’s daughter, or public official is asked to provide not only a checklist of facts and figures but also a personal interpretation of historical events and social issues.

One pragmatic use of oral history in archaeological research is that “old-timers” can help define and map a site. As an example, 89-year-old Paul Fragulia came out to the Vasco Adobe while the Los Vaqueros Project archaeologists were at work. His memories helped the researchers reconstruct the style and plan of the Adobe itself as well as the location of the 19th-century farmhouse that stood nearby. The Bonfante sisters, working with the oral historian, drew a map of their former tenant ranch that guided and informed the site crew when this ranch was dug in the summer of 1995.

But oral history obviously offers a more profound resource to the student of 19th- and early 20th-century social history. It provides for a more humanized history and one that presents many voices (that is, it is multivocalic). The “necessity” for doing oral-history work is also underscored by the fact that culture is often expressed ephemerally. How does one dig up a fiddle tune or a ballad or recon-
construct a quilting bee? Did farmhands in the Vasco eat with ranch families or was there a social distance between farmer and laborer? Did Italians continue to play *bocce* when they settled in the Vasco or did they even think of themselves as “Italians” at all? In short, oral history can serve as a first order of ethnography to address questions about cultural heritage, ethnicity and identity, gender relations, and the social use of space.

**Archaeological Field Work**

Archaeology can teach us about how people lived, how they shaped their physical environment, and what kinds of objects they chose to own and how they used them. It is particularly effective because it is reflective—that is, the material world embodies the conscious and unconscious decisions of its inhabitants and reflects truths about how they viewed their place in the world. A neatly landscaped front yard suggests a concern with the way outsiders perceive one’s home; a set of matching dishes communicates to guests a certain sense of order and social status; while a hand-pumped well reflects an economic or technological reality within which a family was required to live.

The excavation methods of historical archaeology vary at least superficially from practitioner to practitioner, but the strongest tool—one shared by most historical archaeologists—is stratigraphic excavation. This means digging each distinct layer of sediment, fill, or cultural accumulation separately, from the most recently deposited at the top down to the oldest at the bottom. In this way, the depositional history of a site can be “read” and some of the events that occurred there can be reconstructed.

Events in the life history of an archaeological site are recorded in the layers that accumulate, because different activities result in physically distinct deposits. Picture an open pit, perhaps a hole dug to throw garbage into, or an abandoned well, or maybe even a drainage ditch. Over time, the pit will fill up with sediment or cultural detritus. A long period of inactivity may be recorded as a series of thin laminates of slightly different color washed into the hole by seasonal flooding, hillside erosion, or wind-borne dust. An episode of trash disposal will result in a layer of dirt mixed with artifacts or bones; if the trash included animal or plant material, the dirt itself might be dark and rich with decayed organics. Or material may have been brought in to fill the hole on purpose, to keep children or animals from falling into it; this might be free of artifacts but mottled in color, the result of different layers being mixed when the fill was moved from one place to another.

Other kinds of events can be understood in relation to these depositional layers. The construction of a wall, the laying of a floor, the digging of a ditch, the abandonment of a privy: these can all be placed within the sequence of events that shaped the archaeological site. As each of these “events” is excavated, the artifacts associated with it are kept separate. These are then carefully examined and identified, often enabling the archaeologist to date

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**Archaeological Cross Section.** This drawing depicts various natural and cultural deposits that filled a cellar hole at Los Vaqueros.
the event. The artifacts can tell much more than the date, however, because they vary in kind and quality and reflect conscious or unconscious choices made by their users.

Historical archaeology is most effective when it is used to explore the material world of the people and places identified through the archival research and the oral history. We get the most out of the structures and artifacts we uncover when we know who built and used them, and what the economic and ethnic backgrounds of their users were. Sometimes this is impossible and we cannot know exactly whose “stuff” we are looking at, but even then, we can usually figure out when it was built or manufactured, and can try to understand it in its broader historical context.

Recovering History

Research for the Los Vaqueros Project consisted of moving back and forth between sources of information using both inductive and deductive reasoning and forming, answering, and then reforming questions. The first step was to understand the territory and how it was settled by looking at old maps and histories written in the late 19th century. Archaeological field work came in early in the process as the entire watershed was surveyed on foot to identify sites where people had lived, worked, and played.

Locating the sites generated many questions about the identities of the area’s residents. Some of these questions were answered by looking at land records and census records, and talking to people who knew the area or even lived there at one time. This research, in turn, generated more questions that were addressed through further research and archaeological excavation at selected sites. The archaeology raised new questions that were answered by further interviews with one-time residents, additional historical research, and consultation with various scientists specializing in aspects of the physical environment. All of this information was analyzed, interpreted, and synthesized to “recover” the history presented in this volume.