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The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe

Perspective

The following was a paper presented by Rosemary Cambra, invited panelist and chair of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe during last October's 30th anniversary of Alcatraz. Presently, Muwekma has a formal determination of "previous unambiguous Federal Recognition (as of May 24, 1996) by the Interior Department and is listed for Ready Status for Active Consideration in the Federal Register. Also Muwekma is named under the present bill sponsored by Congress George Miller to be reaffirmed as a Federally Recognized Tribe under the 106 Congress.

The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay and Alcatraz and Angel Islands

by Alan Leventhal (Tribal Ethnohistorian), Hank Alvarez (Tribal Councilman), Monica Arellano (Tribal Councilwoman), Carolyn M. Sullivan (Tribal Councilwoman), Concha Rodriguez (Tribal Councilwoman), and Rosemary Cambra (TribalChair)

Introduction: Cultural and Geographical Landscape of the Muwekma Territory - 10,000 Years Ago to European Contact in 1769

Over ten thousand years ago, before the waters of the Pacific Ocean passed through the gap now spanned by the Golden Gate Bridge and filled the interior valley-basins, Alcatraz and Angel Islands were small mountain peaks which were later isolated by the encroaching sea water, the ancestors of the Muwekma Ohlone and the neighboring tribal groups had established their homes within this changing landscape. The people comprising these early tribal groups gave birth, hunted, fished, harvested a great diversity of seeds, fruits and vegetables, managed large tracts of land through selected burning, married, grew old and died within the greater San Francisco Bay region.

Over these millennia the Muwekma Ohlone tribal groups along with their neighboring linguistic cousins, inter-married and developed complex societies which

anthropologists call ranked chiefdoms. Many of the complex aspects of their social, cultural, religious and ceremonial institutions have been traced back through the archaeological record to over 4500 years ago within the greater Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta and Bay Area regions, thus culturally and biologically linking this larger geographic area.

Based upon this archaeological record, it appears that sometime around 4000 years ago, these ancestral California tribal cultures developed a system of social ranking (meaning hereditary noble lineages and elites who controlled wealth, production, distribution and power) and there also evolved institutionalized religions. This complex system of social distinction was reflected in the elaborate mortuary (burial) treatment of the dead as expressed within the larger geographical area. Many of the social elites (nobility) were buried with grave wealth in the form of social and religious markers of distinction. Furthermore, many these high lineage people during the early and middle periods of time, were buried in extended positions, oriented toward the west, and placed in cemeteries that developed into large earth mounds.

Such was the case within the greater San Francisco Bay region, beginning approximately 4000 years ago, when people were interred in what has become commonly known as the "shellmounds". Historically, these "shellmounds" have been misinterpreted by scholars over the past 100 years as remnant "villages", "kitchen middens", "garbage dumps" and "habitation sites", however archaeological evidence suggests to the contrary, that these mounds formally served as the final resting places for the elite and distinguished members (e.g. fallen warriors) of the many ancestral Muwekma Ohlone tribal societies living around the San Francisco Bay.

In 1769, the evolution of these complex Ohlone societies, were adversely impacted and became another casualty within the international arena of European colonialism. In that year, the Bourbon Monarchy of the Hispanic Empire decided to expand its presence into Alta California. Thus began the first of a series of contacts between the Spanish colonial empire and the aboriginal Costanoan/Ohlone people (whom the Spaniards referred to as Costeños or Coastal People) living within the Monterey/San Francisco Bay regions. Although the term Muwekma is used as an identifier of the modern survivors of the aboriginal people of the greater San Francisco Bay region and whose direct ancestors were missionized into Missions Dolores, San

Jose and Santa Clara, Muwekma also means "The People" in the Tamien and Chochenyo Ohlone languages spoken around the San Francisco Bay [*note: collectively the Ohlone languages spoken in southern Napa, Contra Costa, Alameda, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Mateo and San Francisco Counties have been classified as either Northern Costanoan or Muwekma by anthropologists and linguists*].

Late Eighteenth Century Land and Sea Exploration: Impressions of the Muwekma Ohlone People, Alcatraz and Angel Islands and the San Francisco Bay

During the early Spanish expeditions from Monterey into the San Francisco Bay region (1769 - 1776), the Spaniards encountered an number of Muwekma Ohlonean tribes and villages (rancherias) along the way. Accounts of these first hand encounters were kept by the priests and the military leaders of the expeditions and they provide important information in our understanding of the nature and complexity of 18th century Ohlone societies and their world-view.

In simplistic terms, it appears that the Ohlone treatment towards the presence of strangers within their territories was divided into two general considerations: strangers were considered as either enemies (and/or other powerful forces that could cause harm) or as distinguished guests. Apparently, during this formative, contact/pre-mission period, the Spaniards were not viewed as enemies by the Ohlone they encountered, but in most cases they were invited to their villages and treated as distinguished guests. An example of one such encounter occurred on April 2, 1776, near the Carquinez Straits (East Bay), when Father Font wrote the following account:

We set out from the little arroyo at seven o'clock in the morning, and passed through a village to which we were invited by some ten Indians, who came to the camp very early in the morning singing. We were welcomed by the Indians of the village, whom I estimated at some four hundred persons, with singular demonstrations of joy, singing and dancing.

A year earlier in 1775, the first Spanish ship, the San Carlos, circum-navigated the San Francisco Bay. On board was Captain Juan Manuel de Ayala, First Sailing Master and Map Maker, Jose de Canizares, and Father Vincente Santa Maria, who after having some preliminary contact with the Karkin (northern Ohlones), decided to go ashore and visit a village located some distance inland. Father Santa Maria left us with the

following account: *There was in authority over all of these Indians one whose kingly presence marked his eminence above the rest. Our men made a landing, and when they had done so the Indian chief addressed a long speech to them*

After the feast, and while they were having a pleasant time with the Indians, our men saw a large number of heathen approaching, all armed with bows and arrows."

This fear obliged the sailing master to make known by signs to the Indian chieftain the misgivings they had in the presence of so many armed tribesmen. The themi (chief), understanding what was meant, at once directed the Indians to loosen their bows and put up all of their arrows, and they were prompt to obey. The number of Indians who had gathered together was itself alarming enough. There were more than four hundred of them, and all, or most of them, were of good height and well built.

Alcatraz apparently was used as a fishing station, while Angel Island was more permanently occupied by Muwekma people at the time of European contact. Both islands were mapped by the Jose de Canizares of the San Carlos. On August 12, 1775, Captain Ayala noted in his log: *The longboat was lowered and I set out in it to find a better anchoring ground for the ship. I was looking over the island that I called Angels' Island, the largest one in this harbor, and making close search for an anchoring place that handily provided water and firewood. Although I found some good ones, I was inclined to go further and look over another island, and found it quite barren and rugged and with no shelter for a ship's boats. I named it Pelican Island because of the large number of pelicans that were there.*

Alcatraz was so named Ysla de Alcatrazes (Pelicans) by Captain Ayala (although some believe this is actually Yerba Buena Island). On August 14, 1775, the San Carlos casts her anchor opposite a large island which they named Santa Maria de los Angeles (Angel Island) in honor of the Blessed Virgin as Queen of the Angels. On this island they found two Ohlone rancherias and also evidence of religious activities. Father Vincente Santa Maria described some of these shrines: *These were slim round shafts about a yard and a half high, ornamented at the top with bunches of white feathers, and ending, to finish them off, in an arrangement of black and red-dyed feathers imitating the appearance of the sun. This last exhibit gave me the unhappy suspicion that those bunches of feathers representing the image of the sun (which in their language they call gismen [the Ohlone*

word for sun] must be objects of the Indian's heathen veneration

The Post-Contact Muwekma Ohlone and their ties to the Yelamu Ohlone of San Francisco, Missions Dolores, San Jose and Santa Clara and the East Bay Rancherias: A Brief Historic Overview 1777 to 1906

The region comprising the City and County of San Francisco was controlled by the Yelamu tribal group of Ohlone Indians. According to the comprehensive mission record and ethnogeographic studies conducted by anthropologist Randall Milliken, it appears that the first four people from Yelamu were baptized by Father Cambon and the others were baptized by Fathers Palou and Santa Maria between 1777 - 1779. Apparently the first converts from the "rancheria de Yalam" into Mission Dolores also had relations who lived in the neighboring rancherias (villages) of Sitlintac (located about 2.6 miles northeast of Mission Dolores), Chutchui, Amuctac, Tubsinte, and Petlenuc all located within the present boundaries of San Francisco. Sitlintac and Chutchui were located in the valley of Mission Creek. Amuctac and Tubsinte were established in the Visitation Valley area to the south. The village of Petlenuc may have been near the location of the Presidio. The Ohlone people from these as well as other villages to the south, and across the East Bay, were missionized into Mission Dolores between 1777 to 1787. According to Fathers Palou and Cambon the Ssalsones (the Ohlone tribal group located on the San Mateo Peninsula to the south) were intermarried with the Yelamu and called them Aguazios which means "Northerners".

Based upon genealogical information derived from the Mission Dolores records, the Yelamu Ohlone people of San Francisco were intermarried with Ohlone groups to the south and across the East Bay, prior to contact with the Spaniards. For example, Fathers Palou, Cambon and Noriega over a period of time baptized the family of a Yelamu chief named Xigmacse (a.k.a. Guimas) who was identified by Palou as the "Captain of the village of this place of the Mission". Two of Xigmacse's wives, Huitanac and Uittanaca (who were sisters) were recorded by Cambon as coming "from the other shore to the east at the place known as Cosopo".

Recently some scholars have suggested that the ending "-cse" on a man's name was served as an appellation of distinction or preeminence, thus identifying that person as a chief or one of distinguished status and lineage. In another case of cross-Bay intermarriage between tribal groups involved a Yelamu woman named Tociom.

Tociom had a daughter named Jojcote who according to Father Cambon was "born in the mountains to the east on the other side of the bay in the place called by the natives Halchis". The place called "Halchis" is the land of the Jalquin Ohlone Tribe.

It was into this complex and rapidly changing world that a young Jalquin Ohlone man named Liberato Culpecse at the age of 14 years old (born 1787) was baptized at Mission Dolores along with other members of his tribe on November 18, 1801. Seven years later in 1808 Liberato Culpecse married his first wife and she died before 1818. Presumably, after the death of his wife. Liberato was allowed to move to the Mission San Jose region, where he met his second wife, Efrena Quennatole. Efrena who was Napian/Karquin Ohlone was baptized at Mission San Jose on January 1, 1815. She and Liberato were married on July 13, 1818 by Father Fortuny.

Liberato Culpecse and Efrena Quennatole had a son named Dionisio (Nonessa) Liberato and a daughter, Maria Efrena. Both Dionisio and Maria Efrena married other Mission San Jose Indians and they had children who later became the Elders (including the Guzmans and Marine lineages) of the historic Federally Recognized Verona Band (Muwekma) community residing at the following East Bay rancherias: San Lorenzo, Alisal, Del Mocho, Niles, Sunol, and Newark. These Elders also enrolled along with their families with the Bureau of Indian Affairs under the 1928 California Indian Jurisdictional Act.

The world of all of the Ohlone tribes was drastically changed within the first 25 years after contact due to the establishment of Missions San Carlos, Soledad, Santa Cruz, San Juan Bautista, Santa Clara, San Jose and Dolores (San Francisco), and with the military Presidios at Monterey and San Francisco. Of the approximately over twenty thousand Ohlonean speaking people who inhabited the San Francisco/Monterey Bay regions in 1769, less than 2000 were left by 1810.

Their numbers continually declined throughout the remaining Spanish/Mexican/Californio regimes, and the surviving Muwekma families eventually sought refuge, especially after the American conquest of California (1846-1848), on some formal land grants and especially the six East Bay rancherias located within their ancestral homelands. During the mid-19th century, as the rest of the central California Indians were displaced and, at times, hunted down, Alisal (located near Pleasanton) as well as the other rancherias, became

safe-havens for the Muwekma Ohlone Indians and members from the interior tribes who had intermarried with them at the missions. The Alisal rancheria was established on a 1839 land grant belonging to a Californio named Agustin Bernal.

Years later, in the 1880s, the Hearst family purchased part of the rancho containing the rancheria and they permitted the 125 Muwekmas living at Alisal to remain on the land. During the early part of this century, the Muwekma Ohlone Indians (later known as the Verona Band) became Federally Recognized as a result of the Special Indian census conducted by Agent C. E. Kelsey in 1905-1906 and the ensuing Congressional appropriation bills of 1906 and 1908 addressing the purchase of homesites for landless California Indians.

Also, independently, during this period of time, Mrs. Phoebe Hearst was responsible for funding the fledgling Department of Anthropology at U.C. Berkeley. Concurrently, A. L. Kroeber, one of the early pioneering anthropologists, helped develop the Anthropology Department at Berkeley and later became known as "the Father of California Anthropology". During the early part of this century, there were approximately 20,000 Indians left in California, a devastating decline from the estimated population of 1.5 million people at the time of Hispano-European contact in 1769. Realizing such a state of devastation, Kroeber and his students embarked upon the task to try to "salvage" as much memory culture from the surviving communities and elders, in order to record detailed aspects about their culture before their passing.

This effort culminated in the monumental publication by Kroeber in 1925, entitled "The Handbook of California Indians". In this Bureau of American Ethnology's (Smithsonian Institution) publication, Kroeber wrote of the Costanoans (Ohlones):

The Costanoan group is extinct so far as all practical purposes are concerned. A few scattered individuals survive, whose parents were attached to the missions San Jose, San Juan Bautista and San Carlos; but they are of mixed tribal ancestry and live almost lost among other Indians or obscure Mexicans.

For the surviving Costanoan/Ohlone people of the 1920s, they never read of this sentence of "extinction", nor did they embrace it. Instead, the Muwekma Ohlone continued to maintain their Indian culture, although by this time completely landless, they like the other Ohlone/Costanoan tribal communities (the Amah-

Mutsun from Mission San Juan Bautista) and the Esselen/Costanoans from Mission San Carlos/Carmel/ Monterey region), continued to survive as distinct Indian communities and speak their respective languages as late as the 1930s.

It is from the work of linguist-cultural anthropologist J. P. Harrington from the Bureau of American Ethnology, who worked in the Ohlone region from 1921-1939 with the last fluent elderly speakers of the Ohlone languages that we know much about the culture and changing world of the Costanoan/Ohlone people. Presently, the grandchildren of Harrington's linguistic and cultural consultants, comprise the Elders and leadership of the Muwekma Ohlone Indian Tribe of the San Francisco Bay.

On the Government side, in 1927, although landless, the Muwekma were administratively dropped or "no longer dealt with" (along with approximately 135 other Acknowledged California Indian communities) from their Federally Recognized status by L.A. Dorrington, Superintendent of the Bureau of Indians Affairs in Sacramento. This unilateral administrative termination was enacted contrary to BIA policy and without any notification or due process for the tribe. Although, the Muwekma Ohlone families had enrolled with the Bureau of Indian Affairs since the 1928 California Jurisdictional Act and have organized themselves according to the Bureau's directives, they still have no right to be recognized as an Indian Tribe under federal law without first being federally reaffirmed and formally Acknowledged by the Secretary of the Interior.

Indians of All Tribes: Alcatraz 1969

In the early morning hours on November 20, 1969, exactly two hundred years after the Portola/Crespi Expedition of 1769, representatives from different Indian tribes throughout the U.S. calling themselves Indians of All Tribes crossed the San Francisco Bay and claimed Alcatraz Island for the Native People of the Americas. This major event, ignited by both the indignities inflicted upon Native Americans for almost 500 years and further fanned by America's consciousness during the Vietnam War and Civil Rights movements of the 1960s, served notice to the dominant society that, although rendered invisible to most of America, that something was still wrong, very wrong in Indian Country.

The Alcatraz takeover was a major wake up call to America, to its government and to its citizens. In a publication entitled Alcatraz Is Not An Island (1972),

Native American anthropologist/historian Dr. Jack Forbes from UC Davis penned the following: *In the 1870's Natchez Winnemucca, respected chief of the Pyramid Lake Paiutes, was arrested and sent as a prisoner to Alcatraz. His crime: Attempting to resist and expose the corruption of the government's agents on his reservation. Natchez did not stay on "The Rock" very long, but other Indians, guilty of the "crime" of resisting white conquest, were frequent visitors to the prison. Now in 1969 modern-day Native Americans are attempting to claim Alcatraz Island in order to both obtain facilities for educational programs and to publicize the desperate circumstances under which Indian people live..... There is little question but that the Muwekma Indian people of San Francisco and the Hulueko [Coast Miwok people] of Marin County were, in the old days, frequent visitors to all of the islands in the San Francisco Bay. ...*

...The Native Americans on Alcatraz are saying that they want to have a place where they can control programs which will benefit both Indians and non-Indians. Those who can see into the future will agree, I think that an Indian museum, memorial, and educational center on Alcatraz will be of great benefit and value to all California, regardless of race.

The Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay: Shattering the Myth that the Ohlones were Never Federally Recognized

Ironically, sometime either before or after the closure of Alcatraz, one of the Muwekma elders, Ernest George Thompson, Jr., became a security guard on Alcatraz. Ernest Thompson, Jr., as with his Muwekma ancestors, was baptized at Mission San Jose in 1912. His lineal ancestry has been directly traced to the Chupcan Tribe (southern Carquinez Straits to Mt. Diablo region), the Alson Ohlone Tribe of the Fremont/Alviso coastal plain, and the Seunen Ohlone Tribe of the Livermore Valley/Dublin region. When Ernest Thompson, Jr. passed away on September 17, 1984, his death certificate identified him as a Security Guard for the Alcatraz Federal Prison.

The Ohlone people have left a record of approximately 13,000 of human history, and today they are still trying to overcome the onus of their sentence of "extinction" placed upon them by scholars and politicians by continuing to educate the general public, academic institutions and the Federal Government. After eight years of being in the petitioning process, and after the submittal of several thousand pages of documentation, on May 24, 1996 the Bureau of Indian Affairs' Branch of

Acknowledgment and Research (BAR) made a positive determination, but reluctantly acknowledged that:

Based upon the documentation provided, and the BIA's background study on Federal acknowledgment in California between 1887 and 1933, we have concluded on a preliminary basis that the Pleasanton or Verona Band of Alameda County was previously acknowledged between 1914 and 1927. The band was among the groups, identified as bands, under the jurisdiction of the Indian agency at Sacramento, California. The agency dealt with the Verona Band as a group and identified it as a distinct social and political entity.

Over the past 18 years, the Muwekma have politically, spiritually and culturally revitalized themselves and formed a formal tribal government in compliance with Congressional and the Department of the Interior's criteria. Presently, the Muwekma Tribe is seeking reinstatement and reaffirmation as a Federally Acknowledged Indian Tribe. The Muwekmas have spent these past 18 years conducting research and submitted to the Branch of Acknowledgment (BAR) over several thousand pages of historical and anthropological documentation as part of the petitioning process.

As Muwekma Elders are passing, the Muwekma Tribe has yet to advance through the "Recognition Process" for complete reaffirmation of its Acknowledged status. For other tribes it has been a long and difficult ordeal as well. For example, it took the Cowlitz Tribe of Washington 22 years to go through the Recognition Process and the Samish Tribe of Washington waited 25 years, including litigation in Federal Court for 8 years, before they won their Federal Recognition. As a result of their litigation, the Federal Courts decided that the Samish Tribe were denied "Due Process" by the Department of the Interior, BIA and BAR.

Presently, there are approximately over 200 tribes in the United States petitioning for recognition. After coming "back from extinction", the Muwekmas now face, along with approximately 40 other California Indian Tribes, BIA bureaucratic inaction and obstruction. The Muwekmas, who have never left their ancestral homelands, have been waiting for a response from the United States Government since 1906. In 1972, as a result of the 1928 California Indian Jurisdictional Act, the U.S. Government made a token payment of \$668.51 (this is with interest back to 1852) as just compensation for the illegal acquisition (theft) of California land, minerals and resources. This payment was issued to help California Indians build their future upon.

More recently, another major decision was made by the Interior Department, on March 26, 1998, Deborah Maddox, Director of the Office of Tribal Operations issued the following decision on behalf of the Department of the Interior: A review of the Muwekma submissions shows that there is sufficient evidence to review the petition on all seven mandatory criteria. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is placing the Muwekma petition on the ready for active consideration list on March 26, 1998.

Now the Muwekma will wait perhaps another 20 years or so in a bureaucratic limbo and holding cell, before the Branch of Acknowledgment and Research decides to review and process their petition. As a result, it is fitting that the tribal representative of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay, stand this day on Alcatraz Island along with their Native American cousins, on this rock - a bleak beacon to the world - to bring attention once again to the injustices confronting not only the Muwekma, but all of the other tribes in the Western Hemisphere who hope and pray that one day they will attain some semblance of justice and obtain their due recognition once again as a Federally Acknowledged Tribe.

Aho!

by Alan Leventhal

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