

# ***UNDERSTANDING THE COMPOSITION OF COSTANOAN/OHLONE PEOPLE***

By

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With contributions from Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation tribal members and relatives

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When Christopher Columbus landed on the Caribbean Islands off the eastern shores of North America, he thought that he had reached the western shores of India. Operating under a misunderstanding of his true location, he assumed that the people he saw were citizens of India. Hence, the name *Indios* or *Indians*. The label stuck and that mistake was never corrected; only later amended and embraced. The ensuing confusion caused by that original mistake still lingers in our vocabulary despite the best of intentions to address this issue. Furthermore, adding to the confusion, during the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Spanish explorers dubbed the native peoples residing on the central coast of California, as *Costeños*, later anglicized as *Costanoan* meaning coastal people. (Heizer 1974) Yet, contributing to this historical complexity, which still exists today for the indigenous people the Monterey Bay Region, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA Department of the Interior has also lent a hand to the legal confusion as well.

## ***The Bureau of Indian Affairs' Response to the Congressional Act of May 18, 1928***

From 1928 to 1933, over 17,000 California Indians registered with the BIA and identified themselves as benefactors of the land settlement claim against the Government of the United States for the State of California. They did so to establish their claim for the 8.5 million acres of proposed reservation lands promised but never delivered to the California Indians as agreed upon in the 18 non-ratified treaties of 1851-1852. (Leventhal, Cambra, Escobar-Wyer, Zwierlein 1993) Recently, the BIA claimed that this registration was not an enrollment of tribes but rather that it was simply a census of individuals and families who qualified to participate in this settlement. Yet, the BIA's tracking methodology mandated the use of tribal terms such as "band," "roll number," and "tribe."<sup>1</sup> Hence, each applicant was considered an "enrollee" with the BIA.

Years later, there was a legal determination as to what tribe an individual belonged. During a snag in the claims hearings, from 1954 to 1955, the BIA and the Justice Department relied on the input of certain anthropologists (e.g. Alfred L. Kroeber and

others from U. C. Berkeley) who argued and demonstrated that California Indians were “identifiable land-holding groups.” (Kroeber & Heizer 1970) It is important to note here, that, earlier, in 1925, Kroeber contended that “the Esselen, a little tribe of the coast south of Monterey became totally extinct forty or fifty years ago.” He added, “Still farther north, from Monterey to San Francisco, and inland to Mount Diablo, were numerous squalid and interrelated bands, many of whose local village names have been preserved, but for whom there is no generic name beyond the Spanish ‘coast-men,’ Costaños, corrupted into Costanoan in technical book English. A century and a third of contact with the superior race has proved fatal to this group also, and it is as good as gone.” (Kroeber 1925)

As a result of the 1928 California Indian Jurisdictional Act enrollment, almost every “enrollee” of Esselen descent, was categorized as Costanoan by the BIA. This same classification was applied to other Indian descendants who are now presently enrolled in the Amah-Mutsun Tribal Band and Muwekma Ohlone tribes.<sup>ii</sup> During the course of their studies, many of these anthropologists determined that the geographical area of the Costanoan speaking people stretched all the way from north of San Francisco, down through and including Santa Clara, Alameda, San Benito, and Monterey counties, to the southern reaches of the Salinas Valley, including Soledad, Arroyo Seco, the Santa Lucia Mountain Range, and the Big Sur Region including the Monterey coastline. (Kroeber 1925, Heizer 1974, Levy 1978)

Since the Special Indian Census conducted by Indian Agent C. E. Kelsey in 1905-1906, the BIA has possessed a tremendous amount of available genealogical and historical information that would have facilitated the understanding of the aboriginal areas from which each of these groups or tribes descended. This Special Indian Census of 1905-1906 and the ensuing congressional appropriation acts of 1906 and 1908 to purchase land for homeless Northern California Indians led to many tribes to become federally recognized under the jurisdiction of the Reno and Sacramento Agencies. For the aboriginal people of the Monterey Bay region, we were federally recognized as the Monterey Band from 1906 to 1923 and never administratively dropped by any BIA or other legal action. Nonetheless, this genealogical information and legal status was ignored by the BIA especially after an unauthorized and unilateral administrative “termination”<sup>iii</sup> of 135 tribal communities by Sacramento BIA Superintendent, Lafayette A. Dorrington.<sup>iv</sup> Dorrington was charged by Assistant Commissioner E. B. Merritt, in Washington D.C., to list by county all of those tribes and bands who had yet to have home sites purchased for them so that congress could plan for the 1929 fiscal budget. Dorrington independently decided to administratively drop the over 135 tribal communities from their federally recognized status. Interestingly, he overlooked the Monterey Band of Monterey County. Nevertheless, the BIA’s position was that the motivation under the 1928 Act was merely to list the identifiable potential benefactors for claims settlement, and not to create any additional tribal enrollments or to recognize any additional tribes. In 1950, those eligible enrolled elders and their children born before 1928 received a settlement check of \$150.00 for the 8.5 million acres of land that was to be set aside for reservations in the 18 treaties. In 1972, those children and relations obtained a settlement of \$668.61 for the value of the rest of California with interest.

### *Mission/Tribal Self-Identification*

On the 1928 BIA enrollment applications, the California Indians were asked to supply the name of their “Tribe or Band.” The majority of these applicants, later classified as Costanoan, supplied the name of the mission that they knew their ancestors were associated with. Although it was rare, some applicants wrote in the name of an ancestral village.<sup>v</sup> Further, the Indians were asked to supply their grandparents’ names and identify their “Tribe or Band.”<sup>vi</sup> Again, most often, this question was answered with the name of a specific mission. These missions had a definite geographical location associated with distinct historical Costanoan tribal groups, as shown in the following list:

- Mission Dolores - San Francisco (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe)
- Mission San Jose - Fremont (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe)
- Mission Santa Clara – Santa Clara/San Jose (Muwekma Ohlone Tribe)
- Mission Santa Cruz - Santa Cruz (Amah-Mutsun Band of Costanoan Ohlone Indians)
- Mission San Juan Bautista - San Juan Bautista (Amah-Mutsun Band of Costanoan Ohlone Indians)
- Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo - Carmel/Monterey (Esselen Nation)
- Mission Nuestra Señora de Soledad - Soledad (Esselen Nation)
- Mission San Antonio - (Esselen Nation & Salinan Nation)

In most of the early mission baptism registers, the friars recorded the aboriginal village names of their new Indian converts.<sup>vii</sup> Further, they often recorded the geographical location of these villages in relation to the mission itself. All of these villages were located in the immediate vicinity of influence to the geographical location of each mission. Those 1928 BIA applicants understood, and embraced, their own respective geographical areas.

Although the BIA applicants at that point in time knew the geographical location of their own ancestors’ homelands, many did not supply the actual names of their contact-period tribes, with the exception of a few of the Muwekma Ohlone Tribal ancestors (which is addressed later in this section). Rather, they associated themselves as Indians being attached to a given mission. “Carmeño” was derived from the name of Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, “Clareño” from Mission Santa Clara. One example, of many, is the application of Isabel Meadows, a Carmeño Indian linguistic and cultural consultant to John Peabody Harrington in the 1930’s. On July 21, 1930, she answered the question, “...what Tribe or Band of Indians of the State of California do you belong?” with the following: “Mission Indian, Carmel Mission, Monterey County, California.”<sup>viii</sup> Additionally, the same information was entered for the tribal association of her mother, Loreta Onesimo. This response was typical of many, many 1928 applicants.<sup>ix</sup>

However with respect to the Muwekma Ohlone tribal ancestors, there were some important exceptions. Three separate, non-related, Muwekma Ohlone family heads answered this same question with the term *Ohlone*. Lucas Marine answered, “Ohlones,”<sup>x</sup> Joseph Francis Aleas answered, “Olanian,”<sup>xi</sup> and Bell Olivares-Nichols answered, “Olanian.”<sup>xii</sup> On other applications, that question was answered with “Mission San Jose,”

and/or “Alameda County.” It is critical to note that this self-identification took place long before the term *Ohlone* became a popular catch all phrase for all Costanoans.

Regardless of the tribal affiliation each applicant may have known to be his or her own, their claim was regionally specific. Based upon the results of careful mission record research, the grandparents of the descendants of the Muwekma Tribe all claimed that their Indian ancestors were aboriginal to the missions Dolores, San Jose or Santa Clara.<sup>xiii</sup> The grandparents of the descendants of the Amah-Mutsun Tribe all claimed that their Indian ancestors were aboriginal to the missions Santa Cruz or San Juan Bautista.<sup>xiv</sup> The grandparents of the descendants of the Ohlone Costanoan Esselen Nation claimed that their Indian ancestors were aboriginal to Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo or La Nuestra Señora de Soledad. However, the BIA chose to ignore this fact and, instead, chose to relegate and classify all of these applicants as Costanoan. Furthermore, some academic institutions, today, still teach the Kroeberian theory of extinction despite his reversal statement issued in 1955 (Kroeber & Heizer 1970; Leventhal, Field, Alvarez & Cambra 1994), and also still teach that Costanoans are a single people, a single tribe, and are a single language group.

### *Native American Identification Labels*

To further confuse the Native American identification issue, more recently, the term *Ohlone* was eventually applied to the entire body of Costanoan people. (See Margolin 1978) *Ohlone* was decided upon as the “politically correct” terminology and means of identification. Indians indigenous to the Costanoan area were virtually re-labeled *Ohlone* as an entire group, again sloughing over the fact that the Costanoan Indians were not and are not a single tribe or people.

Robert F. Heizer explained this phenomenon:

“In recent years the term ‘Ohlone’ has gained some currency as an alternative name for Costanoan. The label Ohlone does not seem preferable to the long-established one of Costanoan. A small tribelet whose designation was variously spelled Alchone, Olchone, Oljon, Ol-hon, and which was located along the ocean coast about half way between San Francisco and Santa Cruz provided 18 converts to the Mission Dolores between 1786 and 1790 (C.H. Merriam, Village Names in Twelve California Mission Records, University of California Archaeological Survey, Report #74, 1968, p. 19). This tribelet, apparently a small and unimportant one, **has been thus selected arbitrarily to designate a much larger series of ethnic groups**, each of which was also named. Even the term Ohlone is a misspelling, perhaps copied from A.S. Taylor’s mistaken rendering in the *California Farmer* of May 31, 1861.” (Heizer 1974) [Emphasis is author’s]

Careful objective research demonstrates how easily labels can be applied without a complete understanding of all the facts. For example, Isabel Meadows is known, in the

academic world, as a “Rumsen” informant. In the book, *The Papers of John Peabody Harrington in the Smithsonian Institution 1907-1957*, Vol. 2, Isabel is shown in a photograph with Harrington. (Mills)<sup>xv</sup> The caption reads, “Harrington and his long-time Rumsen informant, Isabelle Meadows...” Yet, when she was asked where the Rumsen lived, her answer revealed a long ignored fact:

“Isabelle, April 1935: Another kind of Indians here was rum.cen. These and the guatcarones and eslenes were the Indians here. The white (gente de razon) [people of reason] were called monoc. **Has no idea where the rum.cen lived. Very important and carefully heard. No Rumsien at all.** Isabelle, March 23, 1932 **has no idea where the rumcenakay lived.**” (John Peabody Harrington Notes, Reel 72, page 20B) [Emphasis is author’s]

Yet, in her response, if Isabel truly considered herself Rumsen, why did she not indicate her home or that of her ancestor's, as a Rumsen dwelling place? Isabel Meadows was born in 1846, long after the assimilation of nearby villages. She referred to her people and her language as “Carmeleño” rather than Rumsen or Rumsien, the designation of previous anthropologists. History had already taken a toll on our identity.

Further examination of Isabel's own words, however, offers additional clarity:

“Lupecina was Is's mother's mother. She was from Buena Vista (over towards the Sugar Factory) Tomas Cornelio was her husband. They brought from Buena Vista at the same time, estaban. Buena Vista, via Buena Esperansa & Guadalupe are places near together, beyond the sugar factory. It was rancho of Juan Malarin muy antes. Juan Malarin's brother was Moriano Malarin. David Espens (un carm.) later had that ranch. **The people from Buena Vista were of an indiada that were called eslenes. But in idioma eslen.** 13 Mar 1932 (John Peabody Harrington Notes, Reel 72, page 83B. [Lupecina was actually Isabel's mother's grandmother. Emphasis is author’s.]

Again, according to Isabel herself, she was very clear about how the name *Esselen* was applied:

“**The Buena Vista Indians, these Esselenes,** would go to the mouth of the Salinas River to get clams and would camp there a week, having Indian dances. **The name is eslen,** the plural is es lenakay, **and is a tribe name not a place name.**” (JPH Reel 37, page 667) [Emphasis is author’s.]

Isabel Meadows left no doubt. Here are further notes from Harrington:

“Isabelle Meadows Oct. 1934: Jacinta Gonzales... would say `I am eslén, and a southerner (sureno) (because her father was from the South, he was called Sebastian, **and her mother was eslén, from here, from Buena Vista...**” (JPH Reel 37, page 667) [Emphasis is author’s]

The association between Buena Vista and Esselen Indians is very clear. Yet, there is in all of this dialogue ample information that substantiates how distinctly different identity terminologies could and did emerge out of the cultural milieu of Isabel's time into the present. It is therefore no contradiction that the descendants of Thomas Meadows, the full brother of Isabel Meadows, all have continued to embrace the Rumsen identity while other related lineages embrace the Esselen identity. Three different factors must be taken into account – 1) common regional origins, 2) to some degree, the homogenization effect of the missions, and 3) the particularly unique experiential histories of each family. Together, these factors contributed to an outcome in which each family inherited their own distinctive concept of identity. (For further discussion on the subject of self-identity, see "Examples of Identity Given by Descendants of Esselen Nation Ancestors."

The people indigenous to the Monterey Bay Area Region were known as Rumsen, Esselen, Guacharonnes, Ecclemachs, Sakhones, Sureños, and Carmeleños. Other indigenous groups had specific labels as well, labels associated with their geographical origins — people indigenous to San Benito County were called Mutsun, Amah, and Pacines among others; people indigenous to Santa Clara and Alameda Counties were called Jalquins, Chochenyos, and Clareños among many others as well. All of these indigenous people were erroneously lumped together in one category, as *Costanoans* and *Ohlones*.

In addressing the process of federal recognition, the Costanoan tribes have been faced with clearing up the confusion by demonstrating that they were and are distinct groups of Indian people. Therefore, as one means of clearly identifying themselves as three separate tribes, with three separate histories and languages (still spoken during the early middle part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century), each has chosen their own politically correct and identifying names for themselves. Additionally, these names incorporate other government terminology applied to them as well — *Muwekma Costanoan/Ohlone Tribe*, *Amah-Mutsun Costanoan/Ohlone Tribe*, and *Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation*. Furthermore, it is important to note that these three modern-day tribes were all previously Federally Recognized in 1906. Muwekma was identified, by the BIA, as the Verona Band of Alameda County. Amah Mutsun was identified as the San Juan Bautista Band. And, Ohlone/Costanoan Esselen Nation, as mentioned above, was identified as Monterey Band.

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<sup>4</sup> “California Indian Judgment Roll” under Section 1 of the Congressional Act of May 18, 1928, cited from LDS film #908992, held in the Genealogical Society of Utah, Church of Latter Day Saints, 30 E. North Temple St., Salt Lake City, Utah 84150.

<sup>5</sup> Distribution Map found in *The California Indians, A Source Book*, compiled and edited by R. F. Heizer and M. A. Whipple, second edition, revised and enlarged. This map demonstrates the loose categorization of Muwekma, Amah-Mutsun as Costanoan. Esselen, in this book, however, is erroneously designated as Pomo. A more accurate conclusion can be drawn from the thousands of 1928 Bureau of Indian Affairs applications submitted, by all three tribal ancestors, in response to the May 18, 1928 Congressional Act.

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- iii “Drop” is the official term for the action, which resulted in the present status of unacknowledged tribes; Holly Reckord, Bureau of Acknowledgment and Research, Department of the Interior.
- iv Correspondence from the US Dept. of the Interior, Indian Field Service, written by L. A. Dorrington, to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated June 23, 1927, available at the Pacific Region (San Francisco) National Archives (hereinafter referred to as PR(SF)NA), R.G. 75, 1000 Commodore, San Bruno, CA 94066.
- v Question #10, on the 1928 BIA applications for enrollment, asked, “What is your degree of Indian blood and to what Tribe or Band of Indians of the State of California do you belong?” This question was often answered with the name of a particular mission, e.g. #8100, Dave Machado; #10890, Ella Aquilar; and #8095, Gerbacio Lopez. (This point of information resulted from a thorough review of hundreds of such applications which are currently on film, in a special collection,) PR(SF)NA Microfilm Series I-32, boxes #24, 32 and 24 respectively, PR(SF)NA.
- vi Question #12, on the 1928 BIA applications for enrollment, asked “Give the names of your California Indian ancestors living on June 1, 1852, through whom you claim, who were parties to any Treaty or Treaties with the United States...” One column, provided for these answers, was entitled “Tribe or Band.” This question was also often answered with the name of a particular mission, e.g. #8108, Isabel Meadows, PR(SF)NA Microfilm Series I-31, box #24, PR(SF)NA.
- vii Mission San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, Baptism Register, LDS film #913159, GSU.
- viii 1928 BIA application #8108, Isabel Meadows, pg. 2, questions #10 and #12, PR(SF)NA Microfilm Series I-32, box #24, PR(SF)NA.
- ix For further information on this topic, refer to the independent paper entitled, “The Composition of Costanoan People,” by Escobar, Leventhal and Field, dated May 11, 1998.
- x 1928 BIA application #10298, for Lucas Marine, Pg. 2, Pacific Sierra Region National Archive (hereinafter referred to as PR(SF)NA) Microfilm Series I-32, box 31, PR(SF)NA. Photocopy in possession of Muwekma Tribal Office, 503-A Vandell Way, Campbell, CA 95008.
- xi 1928 BIA application #10299, for Joseph Francis Aleas, Pg. 2, PR(SF)NA Microfilm Series I-32, box 31. Photocopy in possession of Muwekma Ohlone Tribe.
- xii 1928 BIA application #10300, for Bell Nichols, Pg. 2, PR(SF)NA Microfilm Series I-32, box 31. Photocopy in possession of Muwekma Ohlone Tribe.
- xiii Having been the tribal genealogist for Esselen Nation and Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, I have seen proof of the lineages that demonstrate this fact although I am not a liberty to thoroughly discuss these lineages due to privacy issues. However, as a tribal genealogist, it has been my responsibility to provide this proof to the federal government as required by the genealogical criteria of the Federal Recognition Process for unacknowledged tribes.
- xiv Many Indians have more than one Indian village group from which they descend. Hence, there are several tribal members of the Amah-Mutsun Tribe who are descended

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from Esselen ancestors as well as there are tribal members of the Esselen Nation who are descended from Salinan ancestors. Some tribal constitution and enrollment policies disallow a dual tribal membership; therefore, each individual, who has more than one tribal connection must choose one over the other to qualify for tribal membership with a particular tribe. Therefore, the associated mission, of the chosen affiliation, demonstrates the geographical origin of that ancestry and tribe.

<sup>xv</sup> This book, *The Papers of John Peabody Harrington in the Smithsonian Institution 1907-1957*, Vol. 2, is the companion to the hundred reels of microfilms that were taken of J.P. Harrington's field notes during his crusade to salvage the remnant of California Indian languages. These films are currently on file at the Clark Library, San Jose State University, One Washington Square, San Jose, CA 95192.