

ETHNOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

The Project Area is located within the ethnographic territory of the Patwin tribe (Johnson 1978). The Patwin occupied lands in the southern portion of the Sacramento River Valley, to the western banks of the Sacramento River, and from the town of Princeton southward to San Pablo and Suisun Bays. The Patwin spoke a distinct dialect of Wintuan known as Southern Wintuan which also belongs to the Penutian language family (Merriam 1966; Johnson 1978).

Low natural rises along streams and rivers were the preferred location for Patwin villages, which typically had bedrock mortars, dance houses, sweat houses, and acorn granaries, and many had cemeteries. Typical communities included a central village with several smaller satellite villages. Groups erected temporary brush shelters while hunting or gathering seasonal plant resources, frequently at higher elevations. Among the major villages established and occupied by the Patwin at the time of European contact were Aguasto, Bo'-do, Chemocu, Churup, Dok'-dok, Gapa, Imil, Katsil, Kisi, Koh'pah de'-he, Koru, and Kusêmpu, (Johnson 1978). The nearest village to the Project Area was Ho'lokomi, located roughly 5 miles to the northeast on the eastern banks of the North Fork of Cache Creek. The Patwin usually buried their dead, though cremation was common in instances when a tribal member died away from the village (Kroeber 1925; Johnson 1978).

Subsistence fishing and hunting, and collecting plant foods in an area where abundant natural resources varied seasonally, comprised the fundamental economy of Patwin tribes. Like most native Californian groups, they relied on the acorn as a staple food, and used a wide variety of tools, implements and enclosures to collect and process food resources. These included bows and arrows, traps, harpoons, hooks, nets, portable stone mortars, bedrock mortars and pestles, various woven tools, and canoes made of tule balsa or logs. The Patwin also traded with neighboring groups for shell ornaments and monetary beads, steatite, and obsidian (Johnson 1978).

Europeans arrived in the Clear Lake Basin relatively late in the colonial history of North America. Though the first contact between Europeans and Northern California Native peoples probably occurred as early as 1579 (Sir Francis Drake's expedition), there are no published accounts of European contact with the Clear Lake Basin until 1832-33 when a party of American trappers working for the Hudson's Bay Company passed through the area. This lack of European contact is unique for California's contact period considering Spanish missions were established around San Francisco Bay and up to the Sonoma Valley in the late 1700's and early 1800's. Historical records are clear that contact with the Spanish occurred in 1841 when Salvador Vallejo sent men into the area to round up Indians to work on his Sonoma Valley Ranch (Lake County 2019). Patwin groups are also known to have been forcibly taken by the Spanish to Mission Dolores in San Francisco (Johnson 1978).

The remote nature of the Clear Lake Basin, served to buffer the native people from many of the disrupting activities that were taking place elsewhere in California. Most written accounts indicate that traditional life in the Clear Lake Basin continued until the 1870's. However, gradually from the mid-19th century, enslavement and mistreatment by Spanish soldiers and missionaries, Mexican land barons, European settlers, and gold diggers, combined with a lack of natural immunity to European diseases, decimated approximately 75% of the Patwin population, wiping out entire villages and forcing the survivors to retreat into the hills (Cook 1976a).