A year built in the Bay Area

The Golden Gate Bridge is the setting of a spectacular fireworks display during the 75th anniversary celebration on May 27, 2012.

Photo credit: Charles Leung

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2012, what a year! The 75th anniversary of the Golden Gate Bridge. Twelve months of food, fun, fireworks, and the Bay Area coming together to celebrate the golden icon that brings us together every day.

The Golden Gate Bridge and Wells Fargo have been American icons throughout their histories. We’ve been honored to share the celebrations of the Golden Gate Bridge 75th anniversary with you throughout the year, and hope you have enjoyed them all.

Visit goldengatebridge75.org for 75th anniversary news and updates.

The Golden Gate Bridge and Wells Fargo — built in the Bay Area

Together we’ll go far
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ON THE FRONT COVER
(Detail) The artist and U.S. Army officer Alfred Sully (1821–1879) held posts in Monterey
and Benicia, California, during the years immediately following the American conquest
of California. As Stephen Hyslop observes, Sully described people and scenes of California
society in his letters and artwork. This untitled painting, created circa 1850, is an idealized
view of the life to which he aspired at the time (see pages 4–17).

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David Bowie wrote and recorded the song “Changes” in 1971. Perhaps he meant the mysterious lyrics to reflect his chameleon-like persona or technological changes in the music industry. Whatever the inspiration, countless listeners have found tender value in Bowie’s admonition to “Turn and face the strange changes . . . but I can’t trace time.”

Neither could Californians trace or control the changes time brought over the centuries. For Native Americans when Spaniards established missions, presidios, and towns, and for Californios of Spanish and Mexican descent when Americans conquered Alta California, achieved statehood, and built a burgeoning state, time did anything but stand still.

Change, of course, is what history is about, and in this issue, three essays encapsulate much of the chronology and many effects of sweeping social, political, economic, cultural, and personal changes that people—and time—brought about.

In his essay, “‘With the God of Battles I Can Destroy All Such Villains’: War, Religion, and the Impact of Islam on Spanish and Mexican California, 1769–1846,” Michael Gonzalez asks how much, and in what form, the Muslim idea of sacred violence influenced the Franciscan priests and Spanish-speaking settlers who lived in California.

In “Courtship and Conquest: Alfred Sully’s Intimate Intrusion at Monterey,” Stephen G. Hyslop brings perspective to the complexities of personal relationships between conquered peoples and their conquerors, relating U.S. Army Lieutenant Sully’s intimate social interactions with Californios, Native Americans, and Southerners during his long military career.

Phoebe Cutler, in “Joaquin Miller and the Social Circle at the Hights,” provides a colorful sketch of the controversial and magnetic “Poet of the Sierras.” Once a gold miner, Indian fighter, Pony Express rider, backwoods judge, and journalist, Miller envisioned his Oakland Hills outpost “the Hights”—built in the mid-1880s—as an artists’ retreat. His vision became reality as California’s literati, artists, and political figures flocked to him and his eccentric ranch at the turn of the last century.

As if to demonstrate the incontrovertible permanence of change with the passage of time, this issue—vol. 90, no. 1—is the last print edition of the journal, as decided by the Board of Trustees of the California Historical Society. An electronic issue, vol. 90, no. 2, will be published in April 2013 as the last appearance of California History, terminating its ninety-year existence.

Janet Fireman
Among the examples of early Californiana in the Geil J. Norris collection is this pairing: a photograph of Manuel Castro, prefect of Monterey, in his later years and in military regalia, and an English translation of his March 5, 1846 letter to Captain John C. Frémont ordering him to remove his forces from Monterey. The letter was written at a time of escalating tensions between the United States and Mexico culminating in the Mexican War (1846–48).

Photograph of Manuel Castro (undated) and English translation of his letter to John C. Frémont (March 5, 1846), Geil J. Norris family papers, Vault MS 156 f.10.001.tif

**Mexican Californiana**

The grouping represents a collection rich in correspondence, broadsides, baptismal certificates, land records, and ephemera documenting the political, military, economic, and social life of Norris’ prominent Mexican ancestors. Other noteworthy examples from the collection—the majority of which are in Spanish—are an 1844 broadside announcing Thomas O. Larkin’s appointment as U.S. consul; letters by Larkin, Agustín Zamorano, and Pío Pico; and documents pertaining to the Mexican War.

Norris was a descendant of the Cota, Pico, Castro, and Sanchez families, whose members—notably Pío Pico, Manuel Castro, Juan B. Castro, and Rafael Sanchez—were leading figures in the affairs of Mexican California.
Alfred Sully was not born to conquer, but as a young man seeking distinction in an era of relentless American expansion, he found that path laid out for him. The son of painter Thomas Sully of Philadelphia, one of the nation’s leading portraitists, he entered West Point in 1837 at the age of sixteen, hoping to put his creative talents to constructive use as a draftsman and engineer. A decade later, however, during the Mexican War, he took part as an infantry commander in the shattering American assault on Veracruz, which fell to forces led by General Winfield Scott in March 1847 after being blasted by artillery fire. “Such a place of destruction I never again wish to witness,” Lieutenant Sully wrote. He was sorry to say that women and children were among the victims, but faulted the populace for not fleeing the city in advance: “General Scott gave them warnings of his intentions, but, Mexican-like, they depended too much on the strength of the place.” That was mild criticism compared with the aspersions cast on Mexicans by some Americans who invaded their homeland and wrought destruction without regret. Sully seemed better suited for the role of reconstructing a defeated country and reconciling its people to conquest. Such was the task that awaited American occupation forces when he landed in Monterey, California, in April 1849 as quartermaster. The society Sully encountered there had a tradition of accommodating newcomers through hospitality, courtesy, and courtship. Ever since Spanish colonial rule ended and barriers to foreign trade and settlement were lowered, Mexican residents of Spanish ancestry, known as Californios, had compensated for their small numbers and inadequate defenses by incorporating as friends and kin Americans and other foreigners who might otherwise have remained alien and potentially hostile. That policy also brought economic benefits in the form of partnerships with merchants and captains who arrived by sea and traded, mingled, and intermarried with Californios. Far less obliging to them were the mountain men and land-hungry pioneers who entered California overland from the United States and actively opposed Mexican authorities as war loomed in early 1846. After American forces occupied their territory in July 1846, Californios had reason to fear that their new rulers might behave less like the adaptable Yankee traders of old than the confrontational overlanders who had ignited the Bear Flag Revolt a month earlier and ushered in the conquest. Those two groups represented contrasting aspects of the American character and American expansion, which was inherently contradictory, for it transformed a republic that was born in
rebellion against imperial rule into an imposing empire in its own right. Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to his presidential successor James Madison in 1809, tried to resolve that contradiction in writing by referring to the dynamic young nation he helped foster and expand as an “empire for liberty.” But did that mean liberty and justice for all those incorporated within the emerging American empire in decades to come, including Indians and people of Spanish heritage? Or was the true purpose of westward expansion to subdue and dispossess those of other races or nationalities and clear the way for settlement by Anglo-Americans, for whom liberty was reserved?

Under the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo that ended the Mexican War, all Californios were to become American citizens unless they chose to remain Mexican citizens. In either case, their property was to be respected and protected. But that guarantee was threatened by a vast influx of Anglo-Americans, many of whom came to California seeking gold but remained as settlers, often infringing on Californios’ property rights, which were not, in fact, protected under American law. When Alfred Sully arrived in California, that convulsive American takeover—to which the Mexican War was merely a prelude—was just beginning. Uncertain of their
A portrait of Alfred Sully as a young lieutenant during the Mexican War (1846–48) was featured in this 1914 article in the New York Times, along with drawings he made during that conflict and an excerpt from a letter he wrote describing the American assault on Veracruz in 1847. Identified here as the son of the renowned painter Thomas Sully, Alfred became newsworthy in his own right at a time when public attention was focused on “the present trouble in Mexico”—the article’s reference to the Mexican Revolution, which erupted in 1910 and led to American military intervention in that country.

fate, wealthy Californios fell back on the custom of accommodating respectable Americans and trying to win them over. For their part, Sully and other officers welcomed those overtures and found interacting with their Hispanic hosts enjoyable and instructive.

Sully would follow the example of earlier American captains and traders by entering this hospitable society through marriage. But his union would end tragically, and he bore some responsibility for setting that tragedy in motion. Although he had more in common with the appreciative maritime visitors who courted Californios in earlier times than with the defiant overlanders who spurned them, he came into California as a conqueror, and his marriage amounted to a personal conquest, which he achieved by imposing on those over whom he had authority. This ill-fated marriage was the first of three such relationships Sully entered into during his military career, all of them with women from groups subsumed forcefully within the expansive nation he served. Professionally and personally, he wrestled with the contradictions inherent in Jefferson’s goal of an empire for liberty—a problematic objective that could not be pursued without taking liberties in the process.

**HOSTING THE OCCUPIERS**

Soon after landing in Monterey, Sully made the acquaintance of Angustias de la Guerra, whose Spanish-born father, José de la Guerra y Noriega, had commanded the presidio at Santa Barbara and whose husband, Manuel Jimeno Casarin, had served as an official in Monterey before American forces occupied the town in 1846. She had long and close ties to Anglos. Among her in-laws were the American merchant Alfred Robinson and the English trader William Hartnell, both of whom had become Catholics and Mexican citizens before entering her family. Annexation by the United States, she concluded, was a better fate for California than continuing “on the road to utter ruin” under a poor and politically unstable Mexico. American forces took Monterey unopposed, and she and other prominent residents saw no reason to spurn polite American officers such as Lieutenant Edward Ord, brother of Dr. James Ord, an army physician whom she married following the death of Jimeno. In her wartime diary, she referred to Edward Ord fondly as “Don Eduardo,” observing that “he looks like one of us. He is very charming and dances divinely.” But her friendship with him and other American officers did not ease her fears that this new regime might bring wrenching changes to her country. “Putting the laughter and dancing aside,” she wrote, “we are all ill at ease because we do not know how we, the owners of all this, will end up! May God be with us!”

**Professionally and personally, he wrestled with the contradictions inherent in Jefferson’s goal of an empire for liberty—a problematic objective that could not be pursued without taking liberties in the process.**
Señora de la Guerra’s ambivalence toward the occupiers was aptly summarized by an American acquaintance, the merchant William Heath Davis, who married into this society. Prior to the Mexican War, Davis wrote, the women of California “were wholly loyal to their own government and hated the idea of any change; although they respected the Americans, treated them with great cordiality and politeness, and entertained them hospitably at their homes, they would not countenance the suggestion that the United States or any foreign power should assume control of the country.” Angustias de la Guerra—who followed Spanish tradition by retaining her maiden name but was referred to by Davis as Mrs. Jimeno—shared those sentiments and was initially hostile to invading Americans. “In a patriotic outburst,” Davis related, she “exclaimed one day that she would delight to have the ears of the officers of the United States squadron for a necklace, such was her hatred of the new rulers of her country.” But whenever an American officer was taken sick, he added, “Mrs. Jimeno was the first to visit the patient and bestow on him the known kindness so characteristic of the native California ladies.”

Angustias’s policy of dealing charitably with Americans in the hope that they would respond in kind continued after the war, affording Sully and other officers a gracious hostess to look after...
them. In a letter written to his family not long after he reached Monterey, Sully described her as “a tall majestic looking woman, about 30 or 35, remarkably handsome . . . very agreeable, very good natured & very smart. In fact she is a well read woman & would grace any circle of society.” With her husband away temporarily and there “being no male in the house,” he added, “Me Madre (that is the name she calls herself though she is rather young & handsome to have so old a boy as me) requested me to make her house my home.” This might have been considered improper if she lived alone, but the house was brimming with servants and family members, including her eldest daughter, Manuela, who was fifteen and of marriageable age. Manuela was “remarkably pretty & gay,” he wrote, and “like all Spanish girls, monstrous fond of a flirtation. I fear she finds this rather a hard job with me, for my bad Spanish always sets her a laughing.”

Sully was captivated by Manuela and eventually proposed marriage. But until he made his intentions clear he remained quite close to her mother, who served officially as godmother to many youngsters in California and continued in that capacity informally by taking Sully under her wing. She was only six years older than he was, and he at first found her a more congenial companion than Manuela, who struck him initially as too young and impulsive for an officer approaching thirty. In letters home, he mentioned the mother more often than the daughter and used language that caused family members to worry that he was straying into an affair. “Could I come across another Doña Angustias de la Guerra,” he wrote in August 1849, “I don’t think I would long be an old bachelor. She has given me a piece of gold from which I wish you to have made a ring.” To ease his family’s concerns, he later explained that he wanted the ring “to adorn my person & at the same time show my respect for the lady (who is by-the-by a married lady with 7 children).” There was, in fact, nothing improper in his relationship with Angustias, but he was less than truthful when he claimed that he had “not yet seen anybody in this country good enough for me.” Indeed, when later deprived of the company of Angustias and Manuela he found that they had been almost too kind and too good for him and left a void in his life that he found hard to fill.

Angustias de la Guerra (1815–1890) sat for this portrait sometime after her marriage to Dr. James Ord in 1856. The daughter of José de la Guerra y Noriega (1779–1858), one of Mexican California’s leading figures, she told of her experiences in a diary she kept during the Mexican War and in a lengthy dictation to Thomas Savage, who interviewed her in 1878 while conducting research for Hubert Howe Bancroft’s multivolume History of California. Perhaps because the subject remained painful to her, she made little mention of her beloved daughter by her first marriage, Manuela Jimeno (1833–1851), who died ten months after wedding Alfred Sully without parental consent. California Historical Society, CHS2012.1014.tif
When Angustias befriended Sully, her marriage was strained. (She and Jimeno were at odds over financial and family matters and would separate before he died in 1853.) She found solace in the attention this courtly young American paid her, but she allowed Manuela to enjoy his company as well. On one occasion when Manuela asked to attend a dance with friends, Angustias suggested that Sully serve as her chaperon. “If my son Don Alfredo will take my daughter to the ball,” she declared, “she can go.” Angustias trusted in Sully and must have been shocked when he asked for Manuela’s hand in marriage a short time later, but she and her husband did not rule out the match. Their chief concern was that Sully was not a Catholic, and they told him that they would have to consult relatives, including Manuela’s paternal uncles Antonio and José Joaquín Jimeno, who served as priests to small communities of Christian Indians still living at California’s decaying missions.

Unlike Robinson, Hartnell, and other foreign settlers who adopted the customs and creed of their hosts, Sully had no intention of converting to Catholicism. Fearing that he would never gain parental consent and would lose the popular Manuela to another suitor, he took strong measures that he admitted were “not altogether according to Hoyle,” or in keeping with the rules that gentlemen were supposed to observe. He arranged for the wife of a fellow officer, Captain Elias Kane, to invite Manuela to their home, where she arrived in the company of an admirer, a “young gentleman” of Monterey who was favored by Angustias. While another officer distracted that unfortunate suitor, Mrs. Kane escorted Manuela into the kitchen, where she and
Sully were promptly married by the local priest, who was later removed from his post for performing this ceremony without parental consent. Sully appeared unaware that his actions might have compromised the priest and insulted the young admirer who had unwittingly escorted Manuela to her wedding, but he could not ignore the offense he caused her parents. “The old folks are as mad as well can be,” he wrote. “I went to see them & was invited never to show my face again.”

Manuela’s parents had reason to feel cheated, but for Angustias the betrayal was deeply personal, coming as it did from someone she had treated as a member of her family. The betrayal was symbolized by the gold ring that Sully had intended to wear in her honor. In June 1850, a month after his furtive wedding, he wrote home to thank his family for sending it: “The steamer of yesterday brought me two letters & the ring, which is pronounced beautiful. Manuela has it.”

Angustias was slower than her husband to forgive Sully, but she reconciled with him when she learned that Manuela was pregnant. By imposing on this proud family and violating the code by which they lived, however, Sully had set the stage for tragedy. In late March 1851, less than two weeks after giving birth, Manuela fell violently ill and died after eating what Sully called a “fatal orange” sent to her as a present. It was rumored afterward that the gift came from a disappointed suitor, who had poisoned the fruit. Sully had urged her not to eat the orange, fearing that it might be bad for her, but her mother thought it would do her no harm and consulted the physician (her future husband, James Ord), who gave his consent. “Thus by the ignorance of a doctor I have been robbed of a treasure that can never be replaced,” Sully lamented. His black servant, Sam, who was devoted to Manuela, became so distraught after her death that he killed himself, believing “that in the world to come we would all be united once more together.” The final blow for Sully came a short time later, when Angustias, who had recently given birth, took Manuela’s infant to bed with her to nurse the boy and fell asleep with him in her arms. “When she woke up he was dead,” Sully wrote. “She had strangled it in her sleep. The doctor persuaded her it died of a convulsion, but to me alone he told the true story.”

In his shock and grief, Sully may have misinterpreted these terrible events. The “fatal orange” was just one possible cause of the sudden intestinal torments Manuela suffered before she died (she may have contracted cholera). And Sully’s assertion that Angustias “strangled” the infant in her sleep hinted perhaps at an unconscious motive on her part—lingering hostility toward him—that existed only in his imagination. But whether those deaths and Sam’s demise were the result of “ignorance & violence,” as he put it, or random misfortunes beyond anyone’s control, Sully had reason to feel that dreadful punishment had been visited on him and his in-laws. “It appears like a judgment from God for some crime that I or her family have committed,” he wrote.

A “JUDGMENT FROM GOD”

Sully was surely aware that the act he believed set this tragedy in motion—eating a forbidden fruit—was like the original sin that brought God’s judgment on Adam and Eve. The fact that his new family’s devastating fall from grace occurred in California, a bountiful land likened to Eden, made that biblical precedent hard to ignore. But there were other reasons, rooted not in myth but in history, for Sully to feel that he, as a representative of the expanding American empire, or his in-laws, as heirs to the old Spanish imperial
order, were being punished for their sins. His personal conquest of Manuela—achieved by defying the values and customs of people over whom he had power as an occupier—was not unlike the exploits of wealthy Californios and their colonial predecessors, who claimed Indians as mistresses or menial laborers. Sully compared their way of life to that of a “rich Southern planter, only in place of Negroes they have Indians for servants.”

Although not a slaveholder, Sully had a black servant, whose death added to the burden of guilt he bore as a master and conqueror and shared with those of Spanish heritage who once dominated this country.

The bitterness and resentment that overcame Sully when the seemingly safe harbor he had found in California was shattered gradually receded, allowing him to resume cordial relations with his in-laws. He and Angustias grew even closer than they had been before, linked now by a sense of loss that was too great for either to bear alone.

Before leaving for Benicia—a transfer he sought in order to distance himself from Monterey and its painful associations—he visited Santa Barbara with Angustias to pay his respects to her father. Sully characterized that venerable figure as a “queer old specimen of an old Spanish gentleman, very polite, very dignified & very hospitable, but very bigoted & very tyrannical but not unkind.” As indicated by that ambivalent assessment, Sully found saving graces in the old colonial regime of cross and crown that his late wife’s grandfather represented. Wishing to see the church where Manuela had been confirmed, he visited the hilltop mission overlooking the town and admired “the altar at which she had as a child so often knelt, & at the foot of the altar the tomb of her grandmother, who was more than a mother to her.” Saddened, he left the sanctuary and walked behind the mission, where an aqueduct built by Indians under the supervision of padres now lay in ruins. “It is wonderful what those old Spanish priests were able to accomplish with the means at hand,” he wrote. “How they civilized the Indians & taught them every branch of useful knowledge & then with the workmen of their own creation erected works that would do credit to any part of the world.”

Sully’s appreciative view of the mission system echoed that of Alfred Robinson and other foreigners with close ties to this society and contrasted sharply with the skeptical assessments of American visitors who remained aloof from
Alexander F. Harmer’s nineteenth-century drawings of the California missions are acknowledged for their realistic rendering and detail. Among them are these drawings of the construction of the first permanent Santa Barbara mission buildings at the Chumash Indian village of Tay-nay-án (“El Pedregoso,” or “Rocky Mound”) and of worshippers leaving the mission church circa 1860. The mission’s construction began in 1787 with buildings of thatch roofs and log walls and the church was completed in stone in 1820. Sully visited the church in 1851 and described it as a “noble old building” that would “put to blush many churches in Philadelphia.”

California Historical Society/USC Special Collections
Hispanic California and saw little to admire in the spiritual conquest of the padres, dismissed by some critics as slave drivers. Were the missions good or evil? This question, which remains with us today, was hotly argued long before the American takeover of California. That event, in turn, contributed to a larger historical debate about the virtue of conquest in general, whether intended to assimilate Indians and save their souls or to further democracy and extend what Jefferson called an empire for liberty across the continent. The fact that American expansionists saw it as their manifest destiny to seize California from the descendants of Spanish colonists—who had regarded their own conquest as pious and providential—raised doubts about such competing claims. Skeptics wondered why God would favor one imperial venture over another, or bless either party with success when neither had motives as pure as they professed. What Josiah Royce said of his own assertive countrymen in the insightful history of California he composed in the late 1800s could be said as well of earlier Spanish colonizers: “The American wants to persuade not only the world but himself that he is doing God service in a peaceable spirit, even when he violently takes what he has determined to get.”

For Alfred Sully, praising the missionaries was a way of paying tribute to Manuela and the world that nurtured her. He did not stop to consider that the good done by the padres might be linked...
to such evils as placing Indians under demoralizing restraint and punishing them bodily if they defied those strictures. Nor did he dwell on the moral complexities of his own position as a conqueror. Good might have come from the offense he caused by abducting Manuela had she and their child survived and his ties to her family lengthened and deepened, making him a bridge between the old regime here and the new. But the tragic consequences of that elopement prevented him from remaining long in Monterey as a guest of Angustias de la Guerra—who kept Manuela’s room just as it was before she married—and sent him into exile. He ended up on the Great Plains, that vast field of toil and strife east of Eden, where he served long and hard as a tenacious Indian fighter.

**INTRUSION AND ACCOMMODATION**

Sully spent almost his entire career in the West. His one notable tour of duty in the East occurred in 1862, when he campaigned as a colonel in the Union Army during General George McClellan’s unsuccessful bid to seize the Confederate capital, Richmond. By then he had met the woman who would become his second wife, Sophia Webster, a resident of Richmond with whom he corresponded during the war. According to Langdon Sully, Alfred Sully’s grandson and biographer, “Sophia was a Southern sympathizer. When Alfred sent a note to her through the lines that he could ‘see the lights of Richmond,’ she sent a reply that he might see the lights but that he would never reach them.”

Before wedding her,

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*In 1863–65, Sully commanded two far-ranging expeditions against hostile Sioux in the Dakota Territory. This photograph of an encampment Sully established during his campaigns suggests its isolation and primitive conditions. Of Sully’s leadership, Colonel M. T. Thomas of the Minnesota brigade wrote: “His perceptions were remarkably clear, and he appeared to know intuitively just where the Indians were and what they would do. These instinctive qualifications . . . rendered him fully competent for the duty to which he had been assigned, and, added to these, a genial temperament made him an agreeable commander.”*

*Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library*
In 1854, Sully began frontier service on the northern Plains, building or repairing forts in the Dakotas, Minnesota, and Nebraska. The proximity of Indian encampments to the forts inspired his paintings of Sioux Indians, including this representation of Sioux Indian Maidens. While serving at Fort Pierre in what is now South Dakota, he fathered a daughter, named Mary Sully, by a Sioux woman.

Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library

he returned in 1863 to the northern Plains and led troops against rebellious Sioux and their tribal allies.

Sully’s marriage in 1866 to Sophia, with whom he had two children, was preceded by a relationship he entered into before the Civil War with a young Yankton Sioux woman he met while at Fort Pierre in what is now South Dakota. In 1858, she gave birth to a daughter named Mary Sully (also known as Akicitawin, or “Soldier Woman”), who later wed Philip Deloria (Tipi Sapa), an Episcopal missionary to his fellow Yanktons and other Sioux. Among their descendants were several notable Native American authors, including their daughter Ella Deloria and their grandson Vine Deloria, Jr., who wrote about the family’s ties to Alfred Sully in his book Singing for a Spirit: A Portrait of the Dakota Sioux. He identified a Yankton Sioux pictured in a group portrait painted near Fort Pierre by Sully—a capable artist if not
an accomplished one like his father—as Pehan- 
dutawin, the woman who bore Sully’s child. 
Langdon Sully did not mention Alfred’s relation-
ship with her in his biography, but reproduced 
that painting and hinted at its significance by 
noting: “Alfred’s second wife, Sophia, was aware 
of the relationships between soldiers and Indians 
of the Sioux tribes on the frontier. She refused to 
let her husband hang the picture of the Indian 
girls in her house.”18

All three women with whom Sully had children 
belonged to groups whose homelands were occup-
pied by American troops and claimed—or, in the 
case of the Confederate Virginians, reclaimed— 
by the nation he represented. Sully’s role as an 
officer and occupier was complex and involved 
both conquest and conciliation. One might say 
that he was inclined to sleep with the enemy, but 
none of the societies to which he was linked as 
a husband or father was intrinsically hostile to 
his own. All had traditions of accommodating 
outsiders or newcomers through hospitality and 
exchanges of gifts, goods, and intimacies.

Sully, in return, welcomed such give-and-take 
and was more tolerant and appreciative of rival 
cultures than many American expansionists of 
his day. Yet, he could not enter as freely into 
those cultures as did civilians like those obliging 
Yankee merchants who settled in California 
during the Mexican era, for whom accommodating 
foreigners was their stock in trade. The official 
role he played in Monterey after annexation did 
not allow for full immersion in the society he 
joined briefly by wedding Manuela. His position 
was more like that of some earlier American set-
tlers who defied categorization as either docile 
assimilationists or hostile intruders.

Benjamin D. Wilson, for example, who arrived 
overland from New Mexico in 1841 and settled 
as a rancher near present-day Riverside with his 
wife, Ramona Yorba, whom he wed in 1844, was 
known respectfully as Don Benito to his many 
Hispanic relatives and compañeros. Yet, his close 
ties to Californios did not stop him from volun-
teeering to fight those who opposed the American 
occupation in 1846.19

U.S. officers serving in California during the 
Mexican War could not easily avoid being cast 
in the role of hostile intruders. But those who 
remained or came here after the fighting ended, 
as Sully did, found themselves in an ambiguous 
position as warriors by profession whose task 
was to help restore order and stability to an occup-
pied country.

Sully’s courtship of Manuela was, in one sense, 
an act of accommodation like that of previ-
ous American visitors who entered this society 
through marriage. But it was also an intimate 
intrusion and personal conquest by an occupying 
officer, not unlike the advances made by Ameri-
cans in uniform in later times as they extended 
their nation’s reach across the Pacific to the 
Philippines and beyond and acquired women in 
occupied countries as wives or mistresses. Intent 
on annexing his beloved Manuela, or winning 
her on his own terms, Sully took liberties with 
his hosts, for whom incorporation in America’s 
“empire for liberty” was, at best, a mixed bless-
ing. Like earlier Spanish colonizers who sub-
jected Native Californians to spiritual conquest, 
he demonstrated that intrusions made with 
seemingly good intentions could have tragic con-
sequences and that no conquest, however well 
meaning, was truly innocent or innocuous.

Stephen G. Hyslop is an independent scholar who has 
written extensively on American history and the Spanish 
American frontier. He is the author of Contest for California: 
From Spanish Colonization to the American Conquest and 
Bound for Santa Fe: The Road to New Mexico and the American 
Conquest, 1806–1848 and coauthor of several books published 
by the National Geographic Society. He also served as editor 
of a twenty-three-volume series on American Indians for 
Time-Life Books.
“With the God of Battles I Can Destroy All Such Villains”

War, Religion, and the Impact of Islam on Spanish and Mexican California, 1769–1846

By Michael Gonzalez

Like Othello, “the valiant Moor” who welcomed the “flinty and steel couch of war,” we, too, gird for battle and ask how much, and in what form, the Muslim idea of sacred violence influenced the Franciscan priests and Spanish-speaking settlers who lived in California between 1769 and 1846. For our purposes, violence means the killing and suffering loosed during wartime. As for dignifying what would be a horrific and murderous undertaking, Islam, more than Christianity, seemed better disposed to include war amongst the holy deeds that defined the sacred.

Such was the case in California. Because the priests and settlers often treated war’s fury as an act of worship—so much so that they exceeded Christian practice—the search for precedent requires us to look beyond the example of knights and princes who fought in the Crusades. Only Muslims, who once used the dictates of their faith to make battle sacred, would transmit the lessons the residents of California, and even Crusaders, chose to follow.

Jihad, one such dictate, instructed the faithful that any task they performed, no matter how violent, could glorify God, while another, ribat, admittedly a term describing many different activities, spoke of the unity believers experienced when they collected as one. Each dictate complemented the other. But of the two, jihad was the more prominent. Regardless of how believers interpreted ribat, jihad helped reconcile the differences by suggesting there were various ways to exalt the spirit. Meaning “effort” or “striving,” jihad emphasized the struggle to resist temptation, or the duty to fight infidels and apostates. The obligations need not be separate. To earn God’s favor, the believer had to meet and defeat any challenger, whether it was a sinful heart or an enemy brandishing a weapon. With piety and violence thus aligned, the two pursuits found full expression between 711 and 1492, when Muslims occupied part, or nearly all, of Spain.
Beginning in the ninth century, and perhaps earlier, Muslim mystics and pilgrims met in fortresses—one of the meanings of *ribat*—to study holy texts. On occasion, they did not collect in a redoubt to perform their duties. But regardless of how and where they gathered, they followed a religious leader. Although they did not come from the ranks of a professional army, they nonetheless trained for war between sessions of prayer and reflection. When Christians or other Muslims attacked or threatened to attack, mystics and pilgrims followed their leader into battle, convinced that their spiritual and martial exertions secured their place in paradise. “There are two times when the gates of heaven are opened,” declared the *Muwatta*, one of the works they studied. “It is during the *azhan*”—the call to prayer—and “in a rank of people fighting in the way of Allah.”4

The legacy of *jihad* earned scant notice in California. No priest or settler mentioned the term in any document, much less admitted its influence. It is also unlikely that anyone possessed a Qur’an or a Quranic commentary that explained the word’s meaning. Even if the Spaniards and Mexicans who settled California knew that Muslims had occupied Spain centuries earlier, many would still profess ignorance of *jihad* and its

*Franciscan priests and soldiers saw the settlement of Spanish California as a spiritual and military exercise. Leon Trouset’s 1876 painting of Father Junípero Serra celebrating Mass at Monterey in 1770 suggests their partnership, one that may have its origins in the Islamic practice of sacred violence.*

*California Historical Society Collections at the Autry National Center; Bridgeman Art Library, CAH 331445*
workings. Nonetheless, when battling enemies, the priests and settlers followed patterns first conceived by Muslims. They performed acts of sacrifice, spoke of their obligation to smite foes for God, and sometimes considered war a sacred enterprise. During the campaign to fight the pirate Hippolyte Bouchard in 1818, a settler asked heaven to bless his efforts: “Under the protection of the God of battles I believe I can destroy all such villains as may have the rashness to set foot upon this soil.”5 A priest, meanwhile, mortified the flesh to seek divine support against Bouchard. According to a witness, the cleric prayed, abstained from food, and whipped himself so God would grant his compatriots victory.6 At the same time, and up through the 1830s, some priests accompanied military expeditions into California’s interior to capture or punish defiant Indians. If hostilities seemed certain, they said Mass for the soldiers and militia and then marched into battle beside the troops.

Any claim about jihad’s influence in California may sound far-fetched or confused. To some, jihad urges the believer to improve his character and nothing more. Others admit that Muslims did invoke jihad to make war, but some historical context is needed. In the first years of Islam, when Muhammad and his companions battled for their survival, they proclaimed jihad to convince believers that God was on their side.7 It is also worth wondering if war in Muslim Spain was as prevalent as we suppose. There is no argument that Christians and Muslims fought one another, but just as notable, and perhaps for longer periods of time, the two sides, along with a sizable Jewish population, lived together in peace.8

There is also some question about the nature of war and its practitioners. Even if Muslims in Spain saw war as a religious obligation, it seems unlikely that such a practice would surface centuries later in California, a place thousands of miles away. Moreover, Franciscan priests had little in common with Muslims who saw war as an act of devotion. The Muslim mystics and pilgrims who supposedly went to battle abounded in great number, whereas the Franciscans, at least in California, were few, and those who joined campaigns fewer still.9 The intrepid priests who accompanied troops into the field do not prove that all Franciscans saw war as a holy endeavor. (The sharp-eyed reader could add that Islam has no ordained clergy or sacraments, at least in the Christian, especially Catholic, sense.) As for the settlers in California, the most fundamental understanding of human nature shows that individuals do not need divine approval to fight. If religion did impel believers to take up arms, Christianity, not Islam, provided enough cause. The Book of Revelation, by itself, with its descriptions of bloodshed and beasts on the loose, could fire the imagination of any Christian warrior.

Nonetheless, these doubts, while valid, and which will be addressed in due time, reflect a misunderstanding. The point is not that Muslims or Christians relished bloodshed. What matters more is how and under what circumstances Muslims and their Spanish-speaking counterparts considered war a sacred effort. But caution is in order. Professing similar attitudes, whether about war or anything else, does not mean one side mirrored the other. Although Muslims were the first to consecrate violence, Christians in Spain, when following suit, did not blindly imitate Islamic habits. Instead, they ensured that the prosecution of war conformed to their beliefs. Over time, as the Spanish-speaking inhabitants of California would confirm, Christians had introduced so many changes that the Muslim imprint had largely disappeared. What remained, though, despite the overlay of Christian ritual and practice, was the Muslim conviction that war was a sacred calling. Thus, regardless of their faith, the men-at-arms knew when, and against whom, they could make piety assume lethal proportions.
THE SETTING

If jihad’s purpose seems clear, ribat, its counterpart, is less so. One authority laments that ribat may be impossible to define. The meaning of ribat varied from place to place in the Islamic world. Even when focusing on a single locale like Spain, the term’s definition continues to baffle because it acquired different meanings over time. As some scholars claim, ribat described a fortress that emerged in northern or central Spain where Muslims and Christians confronted one another. A ribat could even be a citadel in the central part of a city or a watchtower where soldiers observed an enemy’s movements. But whatever its function, a ribat was a fortified place that offered protection or allowed men to train for battle. To date, investigators have uncovered the ruins of a ribat near the city of Alicante in southeastern Spain. Although the site is far from the interior parts of Spain, where ribats supposedly flourished, other scholars have looked at Muslim writings from the early Middle Ages to find mention of believers assembling in fortresses.

Some historians prefer different meanings. Because ribat comes from the Arabic root r-b-t, which means to tie together, as one would tether a herd of livestock, the term could describe a caravansary, a structure that invited traders and travelers to secure their horses or camels before resting. In this sense, there is nothing to imply that ribats were fortresses. They offered protection along a trade route, but they did not exist to make war, much less provide a setting for prayer and study. If the meaning is broadened to describe a place where warriors on horseback could rest their mounts, ribat may still refer to trade because its occupants defended caravans making their way through hostile territory. By the thirteenth century, especially in Muslim Spain, the meaning of ribat had evolved to describe a monastery for Sufis, mystics who formed brotherhoods to pray and who, as the following pages will make clear, often preferred more vigorous displays of faith. Even so, when some Sufis supplied lodging for a caravan or footsore traveler, their monastery earned the name ribat.

To reach consensus on the word’s definition, it may be best to move beyond descriptions of a structure with different uses and give ribat a more literal reading. The term could refer to believers bound together by their devotion. Accordingly, when this collection of believers made war or collected as one to repel an approaching enemy, the building where they gathered would resemble a fortress to observers. But in other instances, and depending on the region where they dwelled, the believers would prefer to pray rather than fight. Thus, regardless of their intent, when believers were tied to one another to perform various duties, they fulfilled the most elemental meaning of ribat.

The spiritual and military dimensions of ribat proved quite popular in Muslim Spain. The historian Manuela Marín explains that by the ninth century, men periodically left cities and towns to gather in places along the coast or in frontier outposts near Christian territory. In most instances, they set the terms of their commitment. They could “make ribat” or “perform ribat”—the expressions they used to describe their devotion—for a number of days or months. When they finished their obligation, they were free to leave. Participants could also perform ribat for any number of reasons. A few used the time away from home to contemplate their flaws and weaknesses. Others went on ribat during Ramadan, the month Muslims set aside for fasting and prayer. But a great many more believed that fighting could express their faith. We do not speak of the professional soldier, though he, as well, appreciated the mystical properties of violence. Of greater interest is the believer who volunteered his time to make war.

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Muslim architectural techniques influenced the Spaniards and Mexicans who settled California. Roofless inner courtyards and fortress-like walls are two elements that found expression in the Franciscan missions.

The Mexican art historian Miguel Toussaint has noted that the mission’s patio “is without a doubt not a Christian plaza” and “more akin . . . to the patio of a mosque.” Its rectangular courtyard recalls the immense patio and surrounding arched galleries and columns of Tunisia’s Great Mosque of Kairouan, built at the start of the seventh century.
The model for Mission San Gabriel Arcángel (founded 1771) (left) may have been La Mezquita, the Great Mosque in Córdoba, Spain (above), which has been converted into a Catholic cathedral. Likely designed by the Córdoba-born Franciscan priest Father Antonio Cruzado, the mission’s capped buttresses, tall and narrow windows, arched shell decorations, and fortress-like appearance display a strong Moorish architecture influence.

Mission: California Historical Society, CHS2012.1012.tif; West Wall, La Mezquita: Courtesy of Ali Eminov
The historian Elena Lourie notes that Muslims may have used the practice of *ribat* to conquer Spain in the eighth century. The Almoravides, a fundamentalist group from northern Africa that came to Spain in 1086, considered *ribat* an important act of worship. They used the practice of *ribat* to train young men in a monastic setting where they prayed and participated in military drills. As for the Almohades, another fundamentalist group from Africa that arrived in Spain in 1147, it is not clear how they regarded *ribat*. But it is unlikely they would let the practice lapse. Some scholars contend that *ribat* lost its military character by the twelfth century and emphasized prayer and study. Nevertheless, the more militant expressions of *ribat* endured for some time. As late as 1354, Ibn Hudhayi, a scholar from Almería in southern Spain, described *ribats* as fortresses that defended Muslims from Christian advances.

If Muslims in Spain associated *ribat* with war, they could consult sacred texts to confirm the connection. It is not enough to cite Quranic passages that speak about the believer’s duty to do battle. The attitudes that emerge in the Qur’an are more telling. The religious scholar Richard Martin explains that in the first centuries after Muhammad’s death many Muslims believed that it was their duty to supersede the flawed tenets of Christianity and Judaism and convert humanity to Islam. Once the world accepted the one true faith, Muslims would restore the perfection that God had created at the beginning of time. To set individuals “on the path of God,” it was incumbent on believers to “command the good and forbid evil.”

When Islam was slow to spread, at least by the reckoning of some Muslims, the world could assume a stark, violent cast. The faithful, along with unbelievers who acknowledged Muslim authority, dwelled within *Dar al-Islam*, the House of Islam. Beyond emerged *Dar al-Harb*, the House of War, the regions where infidels resisted Islam’s advance. With humanity divided, and abiding in uneasy accord, Muslims could use violence to subsume the House of War within the House of Islam. Until the conversion of all, or at minimum until the infidels honored Islam’s primacy, peace would never prevail. Any cessation of hostilities would be but a truce, according to Martin, and once conditions proved favorable, the faithful would press the attack to make Islam supreme.

If war was to be, the believer could learn how his efforts on the battlefield would bring divine reward. Many Muslims in Spain followed the Malikite school of jurisprudence, one of four schools of thought recognized by the Sunnis, the largest branch of Islam. The Malikites took their name from Malik ibn Anas, a Muslim scholar from the eighth century who compiled the *Muwatta*, a collection of teachings attributed to the prophet Muhammad and his companions. Malik emphasized the simple, unadorned piety of the first Muslims—*Muwatta* means “the simplified”—in which the faithful remembered their obligation to make Islam a universal religion. By the ninth century, the Malikites had established themselves in Spain as the jurists and scholars whose interpretation of Islamic law influenced the course of daily life. With the *Muwatta* in hand, some Malikites declared that should a believer kill or be killed, the shedding of blood amounted to a sacrifice whose significance increased his status and the blessings he would accrue in the afterlife. Verse 21.15.34 instructs the warrior that “the bold one fights for the sake of combat, not for the spoils. Being slain is but one way of meeting death, and the martyr is the one who gives of himself, expectant of reward from Allah.”

The consecration of war deepened over time. By the mid-ninth century, scholars in ancient Persia and elsewhere composed *siyars*, histories of
Muhammad’s military campaigns, to remind the faithful they had a duty to fight infidels and apostates. Three in particular, the siyars of Abu Ishaq al-Fazari, Abu al-Awzai, and Abdullah ibn al-Mubarak, which, together, earned the title Kitab-Faddl al-Jihad (Book on the Merit of Jihad), held great appeal in Muslim Spain. Ibn abi Zamanin, a tenth-century resident of Córdoba, contributed to the corpus of militant works by composing Qidwat al-Ghazi (The Fighter’s Exemplar). Some- time in the twelfth century, Abu Muhammad ibn Arabi, a scholar and mystic from Murcia, elaborated on the Malikite theme of purity and simplicity in Al Futuhat al Mekkiya (Meccan Illuminations). At least a hundred years later, Muhammad al-Qurtubi, another Malakite jurist from Córdoba, composed Al-tadhkira fi awhal al-mawtawaumar al-akhira (Remembrance of the Affairs of the Dead and Matters of the Hereafter). Al-Qurtubi argued that Islam’s promise to renew humanity depended on the piety of Spanish Muslims. Once they emulated the Prophet and his companions, they would assume their destiny to extend Dar al Islam.28

Thus, the man making ribat in Spain had ample reason to think war was an appropriate form of worship. He dwelled on the margins of the Islamic world where he faced the threat of Christian attack. Feeling besieged or, if so inclined, eager to prove his piety by going to battle, he could overlook the Quranic injunctions commanding that only a caliph, the recognized leader of the Islamic community, had the authority to declare war. He could follow his own conscience to go on the attack or, more likely, heed a mystic who reminded the faithful how a warrior could find glory.29

If battle loomed, the warrior could approach his calling as would a pilgrim who left home to participate in a sacred exercise. While any pilgrimage in the Muslim or Christian world involves a trip to a holy place, the greater and perhaps more important element of the journey often requires the believer to hunger and fast to repent for his sins. If no different from a pilgrim who makes penance, the murabit—the man making ribat—would also see the violent deed, or the potential of its unleashing, as a spiritual act. He reclined in a sacred moment where the pious deed, even if belligerent, promised redemption. Verse 21.1 of the Muwatta, for instance, discussed the similarities when saying that the man on jihad was like “someone who fasts and prays constantly.” Other works expanded the theme. Al-Mubarak, whose siyar was part of the Book on the Merit of Jihad, argued that the murabit who “volunteered” for battle resembled the pilgrim who fasted and made the haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca.30 In The Fighter’s Exemplar, al-Zamanin, the tenth-century scholar from Córdoba, explained how the pilgrim performing ribat during times of war could atone for his sins. When making ribat, even if briefly, he erased some of his sins and lessened the chance of punishment in the afterlife. Indeed, the longer his commitment, the more likely he cleansed his soul.31

By the eleventh century, the murabit, if he conducted himself as a pilgrim on a sacred journey, acquired the confidence that his salvation, and that of those around him, lay in war. The historian Maribel Fierro writes that a teaching attributed to Muhammad—“Islam began as a stranger and shall return to being a stranger as it began”—convinced believers in Spain that they could elide the boundary between mysticism and warfare. To be fair, the teaching, what Muslims call a hadith, had more innocent applications. According to some Muslim scholars in the Middle Ages, Muhammad prophesied that Islam would become corrupt when the faithful neglected to honor God. To see that believers remembered their obligations, the scholars, and any person who wished to share their sacrifice, set a pious example by retreating from society to pray and perform acts of charity.32
But for other Muslim scholars, the search for solitude justified the use of violence to purge corruption. While cleansing their own spirits, the scholars and their followers believed they could restore the integrity of Islam by attacking infidels or unrepentant Muslims. As a consequence, little distinguished the pilgrim from the murabit who used force. The temporal, human exigencies that regulated behavior lapsed, and any deed the believer performed, no matter how violent, became holy and blessed. Once the pilgrim and the murabit completed their task, the narrow, mortal principles that defined existence re-emerged, and the mystical state that graced the believer came to an end.

The prospect of equating war with piety attracted many adherents. In 1120, for instance, Abu Ali al-Sadafi, a distinguished religious scholar and jurist, joined an army of thousands to fight Christians in northern Spain. He perished in the effort. Two decades later, Abu Ahmad ibn al-Husayn ibn al-Qasi from Silves, a Portuguese city in the south that sits close to the Spanish border, formed a “fighting brotherhood,” a Sufi order dedicated to making war. A mystic and religious scholar, al-Qasi believed that ignorance and selfishness blinded humans to the truth that they were one with God. To address the moral blight, al-Qasi called on the more extreme dictates of ribat. He prescribed religious exercises to his followers so they could clear their minds and commune with divinity. Once they had purged their souls, or at least claimed to, they stood ready to battle sin in other quarters.

By punishing Muslims they deemed corrupt, as well as recalcitrant Christians, al-Qasi and his followers would sweep away the encumbrances that distracted the mind and spirit. What remained after the purging of falsehood, al-Qasi said, would be “no God, but God.” Al-Qasi no doubt possessed the serenity of any person who believes he performs God’s bidding. He likened himself to the Mahdi, a messianic figure popular with Muslim mystics, and raised an army to attack Almoravid governors who lacked sufficient faith and rigor. In time, al-Qasi fell victim to the devotion he inspired. When he tried to make alliances with Christians in 1151, his followers killed him.

The thought of Muslims on ribat, some with weapons at the ready, encompassed the reach and depth of the Christians’ world. The Spanish philologist Américo Castro says ribat formed the root of some Iberian words that commemorated or conveyed the experience of suffering an attack. Some Spanish and Portuguese towns carry the name Rábida or Rápita. The Spanish term rebato means “sudden attack.” Arrebatar is to “snatch away,” while arrebada speaks of an “advance guard.” The historian Thomas Glick adds that war against Muslims convinced Christians they suffered a perilous existence. Confined to the northern reaches of Spain, especially in the years prior to the tenth century, they viewed the Muslims across a desolate frontier that held untold dangers. The boundaries marking Christian territory, even if fixed by castles and other defensive sites, could easily be penetrated by Muslim attackers ensconced in a fortress. In sum, the murabit who saw war as a form of worship embodied nearly every aspect of the Christians’ existence. The men on ribat threatened violence, but in the same instant they granted Christians, and their heirs in the New World, the means to challenge and defeat any foe.

TRANSMISSION

When Christians in Spain employed their enemies’ tactics and religious beliefs, they neglected to describe the process of incorporation. They left no written accounts discussing how they adopted the Muslim approach to sacred violence. None-
theless, it is baffling that the borrowing of ribat, and of course jihad, escaped comment. In matters removed from war, various witnesses, some from beyond Spain, enumerated the ways Christians absorbed or admired Islamic habits.

Upon hearing about Córdoba’s wealth and beauty, Hroswitha of Gandersheim, a tenth-century German nun, described the Muslim city as “the ornament of the world.” About the same time, the Christian thinker Álvaro of Córdoba lamented: “My fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the work of Muslim theologians and philosophers. . . . At the mention of Christian books they disdainfully protest that such works are unworthy of notice.” Adelard of Bath, an English philosopher from the eleventh century, admitted that he cited Arabic authors to make his writings more acceptable. According to the art historian D. Fairchild Ruggles, by the fourteenth century Christian kings of Spain ordered craftsmen to employ Islamic ornamentation in churches and other buildings to project a sophisticated air. After the re-conquest of Spain, Muslim culture continued to impress. Cardinal Ximénez de Cisneros, Archbishop of Toledo and confessor to Queen Isabel, begrudged the Muslims some praise. “We lack their works,” he admitted, but “they lack our faith.”

When seeking to imitate, or at least respect, Islamic achievements in architecture and philosophy, it is likely Christians also embraced the practice of sacred violence. As did Muslims who performed ribat to make war, some Spanish monks and laymen exhibited similar fervor. In the eleventh and twelfth century, they formed military societies like the Knights of Calatrava or Santiago. Like Muslim warriors who claimed that “a thousand angels” would aid them during battle, the military societies summoned their own celestial defender and believed that Santiago, or Saint James, would fight on their behalf.

The men on ribat threatened violence, but in the same instant they granted Christians, and their heirs in the New World, the means to challenge and defeat any foe.

The saint did not disappoint. According to one source, he aided Christians in thirty-eight battles against Muslims. When Muslims claimed that a pilgrimage to Mecca was one of the pillars of their faith, Christians responded in kind. Knights and commoners alike worshipped at the shrine to Santiago in Compostela, a holy site in northwestern Spain that still receives pilgrims from all over the Christian world. Thus, on the strength of circumstantial evidence, it appears that the Christian approach to war, as well as other sacred activities, followed Muslim examples.

Of course, one could say Christians did not need any instruction in the arts of war. The Knights Templar, for instance, who emerged in the Holy Land in 1118 to defend Christian pilgrims from Muslim attacks, may have influenced the rise of military societies in Spain. But enough doubts exist to question the possibility. The military societies often emerged in places where Muslims had performed ribat for centuries, suggesting the
conveyance of ideas from one group to another. Christian teachings also profess some reluctance about the morality of violence. Jesus, in whose name the Christian warrior made war, discourages, if not forbids, attacks against others. He tells His disciples to “turn the other cheek” and “love your enemies.” Jesus also shows no interest in creating a new political order, thereby implying that He renounces violence or any other display of force to implement His teachings. He tells skeptics to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.” When answering Pilate’s questions if he is a king, Jesus responds, “My kingdom is not of this world.”

Jesus’ condemnation of violence had particular impact. Many clergymen and philosophers believed that violence, regardless of the cause, brought limited benefit. The historian Jay Rubenstein explains that prior to the First Crusade in 1095, the Church promoted the doctrine of just war in which only principalities, at the behest of their leaders, could fight one another as a last resort. When war did occur, the killing of soldiers and noncombatants was, at most, a morally neutral act, a regrettable event brought on by circumstances that no one could control or foresee. The warrior who killed, as he was obligated to do when in service to his leader, received no special virtue or promise of reaching heaven. For some clerics, the fact that the warrior killed at all, although tolerated in light of war’s exigencies, proved so reprehensible that it required redress. As late as 1066, for instance, Norman bishops commanded that any knight who killed during the Battle of Hastings had to make penance for a year.

In Spain, the Christians’ reliance on sacred violence, with priests as convinced as laypeople that they fought on behalf of God, reveals that Muslims supplied the justifications that were lacking in Christian belief. When Christians went to fight, the duration of their commitment, and the words they pronounced to sanctify their efforts, were but Muslim habits recast in new ways. Even if the written evidence for the transmission of habits from one group to another is absent, anthropological theory may document the exchange.

Elena Lourie says that the concept of “stimulus diffusion,” or “idea diffusion,” a methodology first proposed by the anthropologist Alfred Kroeber, can describe the connections between Muslims and Christians that witnesses failed to record. Throughout history, Kroeber says, there are many examples of different, even hostile societies, residing side by side, who in time will adopt one another’s practices. In most instances, what makes the transaction more likely is that the donor culture possesses a superior technology or concept, while the recipient culture is bereft of any comparable advancement that will simplify life. But, to complicate matters, even if the recipient culture acknowledges its rival’s sophistication and is desirous of taking on better habits or routines, it will not necessarily emulate everything it admires. Instead, it will take the new approaches and alter them according to prevailing beliefs. In essence, the recipient culture adopts what it pleases and discards the rest.

On this note, Kroeber explained why the exchange of ideas could escape comment. The recipient culture, if disposed to see the donor culture as an enemy, would not want to acknowledge its debt to the other. The members of the recipient culture, then, who have the ability to document their impressions, would not mention the exchange for fear of confessing that they owed their achievements to a rival. Kroeber concludes, with Lourie in agreement, that if the transmission of ideas features a recipient culture loath to admit how it adopted a new way of life, the “diffusion could take place below the surface of the historical record.”
Below: Following the fall of Constantinople in 1453, the Italian Franciscan St. John Capistran amassed an army to defend against the Turks. Armed with a crucifix and carrying a banner on which were inscribed the initials of the holy name, I.H.S., he led a crusade of 40,000 Christians into Hungary in a decisive victory.

California Historical Society, CHS2012.1016.tif

Left: St. John Capistran’s crusader legacy found a home in California in 1775, when he was designated patron saint of Mission San Juan Capistrano. Here, in the central niche of the altar of the Serra Chapel, he presides, holding his crusader banner. The 400-year-old gold altar is not original to the mission chapel, but was brought over from Spain during a 1920s restoration.

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When confronting Muslims inspired by *jihad* and *ribat*, Christians, to counter the menace, did not find the support they needed in their own traditions. They took the principles that caused consternation, and perhaps no small amount of admiration, and called them their own without acknowledging Muslim contributions. As a consequence, Christians in Spain and other parts of Europe borrowed and altered, especially as the years progressed, Muslim deeds and beliefs that best suited their purposes.

In the first instance, when waging war against Muslims, Christians invoked their enemies’ doctrines that honored the warrior who died in battle. True enough, when priests and theologians praised the warrior’s sacrifice, they often spoke of knights or professional soldiers. But as did Muslims, though arguably to a lesser degree, Christians also professed that the humble believer of no means or military training could receive blessings in battle. In any event, after the knights of the First Crusade had seized Jerusalem and tried to secure their prize from Muslim attack, priests and chroniclers celebrated their heroes with praises that echoed the descriptions of *jihad*. When writing to Hughes de Payens, a French noble who established the Knights Templar, St. Bernard declared around 1128: “To be sure, precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his holy ones, whether they die in battle or bed, but death in battle is more precious as it is more glorious. . . . How secure, I say, is life when death is anticipated without fear; or rather when it is desired with feeling and embraced with reverence.”

The Christians, coming from a recipient culture, would not describe how they adapted Muslim ideas. But because the church doubted the purpose of violence, even if employed to defend the place of Christ’s ministry, Christians knew that Islam, and not their own faith, would provide the reasons to honor warriors who risked their lives in the Holy Land. Thus, Bernard’s remarks, when matched with Muslim writings about the value of a warrior’s sacrifice, pose unspoken connections between Christianity and Islam.

Even more, the example of *ribat*, its significance amplified and justified by *jihad*, reverberated throughout Christendom. But, when following Muslim ways, Christians revealed the conceit, and perhaps the insecurity, of a recipient culture whose members believed that they, and no one else, produced the ideas they implemented. The pretense, though, cannot stand up to scrutiny. In almost every sense, the behaviors Christians admired, and changed, corresponded to the Muslim idea of how a believer acquired blessings when he reported to a fortress or retreated into seclusion to follow a spiritual leader.

Various texts describe Christians performing what is, in essence, their version of *ribat* with words and phrasing that refer to the Muslim practice of linking piety and violence. In *The Fighter’s Exemplar*, al-Zamanin, when explaining how the man making *ribat* could speed his way to paradise, raises points Christian authors repeated in their own way: “For he who performs ribat for ten days, God will pardon him for one quarter of the time he must spend in hell; for he who does twenty days, he will be pardoned for half; for he who does thirty days, three quarters of his punishment [will be pardoned]; for he who performs ribat for 40 days, God will free him from hell.” Each idea presented by al-Zamanin—that the believer made what was essentially a pilgrimage; that regardless if he makes war or prays, each deed equates with the other and thus is consecrated; that the rewards he receives in the afterlife correspond to the number of days he spends on *ribat*—provided Christians with material for their own designs.

At the Council of Clermont in 1095, for instance, Pope Urban II urged the assembly to approve
what would be the First Crusade and liberate the Holy Land. Although much of what Urban said is now lost, his remarks apparently conveyed the following declaration: “Whoever might set forth for Jerusalem to liberate the church of God, can substitute that journey for all penance.” Al-Zamanin’s principles now conformed to Christian sensibilities. Previously, only the pilgrim traveling to Jerusalem could atone for his sins. But, in Urban’s formulation, the indulgence—that is, the idea that the pilgrim could repent of his sins—now extended to the knight or any other person who enlisted to fight Muslims.

Urban treaded carefully on this point. Violence alone would not help knights or anyone else gain admission to heaven. As long as they focused their energies on freeing Jerusalem and had confessed their sins, their actions, no matter how deadly, could count as penance. When judgment day came, God would weigh the sincerity of their repentance, a moral condition that presumably involved the dispatch of enemies, and dispense His mercy accordingly. Although Urban did not say the Christian could kill to reach heaven, a privilege supposedly possessed by the murabit, he nonetheless suggests the comparison. By the eleventh century, many Christians had contended with Islamic expansion for hundreds of years and knew firsthand how some Muslims making ribat considered war an act of faith. Thus, even when Christians did not mention it outright, or refer to a scholar like al-Zamanin who celebrated its virtues, they nonetheless paid tribute to ribat, and the devotions it encouraged.

In Spain, where contact with Muslims was more frequent and had endured for a longer time, ribat assumed an intimacy that impelled Christians to take on more of its attributes. In 1122, the founders of the confraternity of Belchite, one of the first military societies established in Spain, echoed al-Zamanin’s provisions. In their regulations the founders stated: “Any Christian, whether cleric or layman, who should wish to become a member of this confraternity . . . and at the castle of Belchite, or any other castle suitable for this enterprise, should undertake to fight in the defense of the Christian people and in the service of Christ for the rest of his life will, after having made confession, be absolved of all his sins as if he were entering upon the life of a monk or hermit. Whoever should wish to serve God there for one year will receive remission for his sins as if he had marched to Jerusalem. Whoever has been obliged to fast every Friday for a year shall have this penance remitted if he undertakes to serve God there for one month. . . . If anyone should wish to make a pilgrimage and for a number of days would have spent on pilgrimage serves God there in battle. His reward from the Divine Benefactor will be doubled.”

The founders of Belchite took and embellished ideas afforded them through their contact with Muslims. War and violence, when directed against Muslims, remain, and arguably assumed more prominence as, penitential exercises. The man who confessed wrongdoing could seek forgiveness by going to battle. The pilgrimage to Jerusalem, meanwhile, while no doubt an important duty, now became one of several exercises that the Christian warrior could perform. The more time he committed to the confraternity, and thus the greater his penance, the more likely he could expiate his sins in equal measure. But, in every instance, and in synchrony with the military obligations of ribat, the confraternity’s rule instructed members that they, as well, resided in a sacred moment that once had graced pilgrims on a journey to Jerusalem. This consecrated existence would last as long as they “served God in battle.” In addition, and again reflecting Muslim example, the allowance to see violence as worship could accommodate priests and monks.
the Christian warrior now had two places to seek penance: “To those who set out for Jerusalem and offer effective help towards the defense of the Christian people and overcoming the tyranny of the infidels, we grant remission of their sins, and we place their houses and families under the protection of blessed Peter and the Roman church. . . . Those who have put crosses on their clothes, with a view to journeying to Jerusalem or Spain, and have later taken them off, we command by our apostolic authority to wear crosses again and to complete their journey. . . . Otherwise, from that moment we cut them off from entry into church and forbid divine services in all their lands.”

who wished to join the fight. Admittedly, there is some debate if the confraternity of Belchite and other military societies truly regarded knights and clerics as the same. To resolve the question would take us too far afield. But, what matters more is that priests and monks, like Muslims who made ribat, could consider battle part of their vocation.

A year later, in 1123, the First Lateran Council convened by Pope Callistus II in Rome continued the consecration of war. War as pilgrimage could now encompass the liberation of Spain as well as Jerusalem. Like a pilgrim who saw his journey as a sacred duty to lessen his punishment in the afterlife, the council decreed that
Again, the equation of the Christian warrior and pilgrim reflected, and owed a debt to, the man on ribat. The Muslim scholar, mystic, or any other person with spiritual ambitions acquired the authority to fight for God. Once the ribat ended and his obligation was done, the special moment he occupied, no matter how holy the cause, ceased to grant spiritual advantages. In like fashion, as the council’s proviso explained, the warrior who tried to liberate his brethren in Spain or Jerusalem, and thus must wear markings to validate his mission, could slay his enemies, and presumably repent for his sins, only while he honored his commitment. Once the warrior finished his task or abandoned his calling to attack another target, the quest, like a pilgrimage that had run its course, was complete.

By the fifteenth century, Christians had taken ribat and made it their own. As Kroeber hypothesized, Christians assimilated, and then transformed, their rivals’ ideas. Employing Muslim precedents, whose shape and contours now sat obscured, Christians presented their efforts to liberate Spain as a santa empresa (holy undertaking) or una santa romería (holy pilgrimage).58 War, like a pilgrimage, retained a finite quality. Once Christians had completed their task, whether it was the attempt to liberate Spain or Jerusalem, they had fulfilled their obligation. There is no need to stretch the point and wonder if we see a Christian variation of the House of War superseded by the House of Islam, though the thought is intriguing. It is enough to say that Christians valued the process that combined war and pilgrimages. Each venture involved a journey whereby the participants proved their devotion by asking for forgiveness and performing certain duties, which included, if need be, the chance to go to battle.

DENOUEMENT

We have come full circle. The ties between Muslim Spain and provincial California, especially concerning the making of war, confirm the endurance of certain habits.59 Spanish Christians who followed Muslim ways, and their descendants elsewhere who perpetuated these patterns, bear out Kroeber’s ideas about culture. The sum of habits and routines that regulate and organize human existence, culture is far from an inert, stolid mass of behaviors that individuals cannot control. Rather, as Kroeber noted, culture may be best described as a collection of practices that individuals can choose, refine, or reject when circumstances merit. The selection of traits that constitute culture may involve ways to defeat enemies. Even when choosing habits from rivals, the members of any culture do so with the intent of ensuring their survival and prosperity. The habits that promise success, although they may emanate from a rival, strengthen and grow more rooted over time when they bring benefit. Accordingly, because the Muslim approach to war seemed superior, Christians of Spain picked through the practices of both jihad and ribat. They selected what they needed, altered the choices to their liking, and employed them when necessary.

At its most basic, the Muslim legacy of mystics and scholars going to war set the example that Christians followed throughout the Spanish-speaking world. In many instances, and in cases that seemed removed from the establishment of military societies that accepted clergy, priests and monks in Spain served alongside, or replaced, knights and soldiers. As early as the tenth century in the Kingdom of León in northern Spain, monks and military men who had become “Arabicized” secured responsible positions in the church hierarchy and civil government.60 By the twelfth century, Cistercian monks occupied an abandoned castle in the southernmost portions of the province of Castilla and assumed the role of soldiers.61 Centuries later, in 1568,
after the re-conquest of Spain, Franciscan priests from the Monastery of Saint Francis assembled with weapons at the ready to fight Muslims who rebelled against the Crown. (It is not clear if the priests went to battle.) During the same episode, four Franciscans and an equal number of Jesuits, doubting the bravery of Spanish soldiers, offered their services to one of the military commanders, declaring that they “wished to die for Jesus Christ.” He denied their request.

In the Americas, some clergy found more opportunities to take up the sword. The buildings missionaries constructed, or at least asked others to construct on their behalf, embodied the principle that force and faith were compatible. As the art historian George Kubler explains, when the Franciscans and other missionary orders proselytized Mexico’s Indians, they employed “the extremely unusual habit of fortifying the church.” The priests built churches surrounded by “a vast courtyard” with “crenellated walls.” The Arabist T. B. Irving adds that many Mexican churches during the colonial era resembled the “open-air congregational type of mosque which was built by Muslims for army worship.”

Apart from churches, some seminaries in Mexico that trained priests to establish missions recalled the shape and function of the *ribat* as fortress. Admittedly, any resemblance may be accidental. But however inadvertent, the seminary’s purpose, and the descriptions it prompted from observers, brings to mind the Muslim effort to prepare the mind and body for any challenge. Father Francisco Palou, Junípero Serra’s biographer, hinted at the parallels when he repeated a colleague’s description of how priests and novices in the eighteenth century prepared for their calling. “What praise and appreciation,” he recounted, “may reach the merit of these men who, ordinarily observing within the cloister walls of their college [seminary] an austere religious life, busy continually with their divine services, find their recreation in going out . . . to sanctify with their missions all of North America.”

Through the years, other clergy consecrated war in their own manner. Francisco López de Gómara, a secular priest who became Cortés’s chaplain and biographer, noted that war helped spread the Gospel. He claimed that Cortés told his men on the march to the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán that “it is foreign to our Spanish nation” to refuse the challenge of war and forsake the chance “to exalt and increase Our Catholic Faith.” Juan Ginés Sepúlveda, a Dominican priest, argued that the “Spaniards were especially noted for warfare and government, and hence best [suited] for the mission of bringing the gospel and civility to the conquered peoples of the Americas.”

In the late eighteenth century, Father Romualdo Cartagena, rector of the College of Santa Cruz in Querétaro, claimed that “soldiers” with “glistening” swords were more effective than “the voice of five missionaries.” A century later, a commentator praised Father Isidoro Felix de Espinosa for writing about the conversion of Mexico’s Indians with a soldier’s resolve: “He was the Julius Caesar of New Spain [Mexico], for like that ancient Roman, he fought by day . . . and wrote by night.”
Some priests wanted to experience, rather than write about, the chance to fight on God’s behalf. When Father Miguel Hidalgo led Mexico’s fight for independence in 1810, he unfurled banners upon which his followers had emblazoned an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Rallying his troops, he proclaimed that all should align themselves with God and deliver Mexico from the Spaniards who had fallen sway to the anti-Catholic ideas of the French Revolution. José María Morelos, another rebel priest, proved quite adept at guerrilla warfare, and in 1813 he approved the Constitution of Chilpancingo that recognized Catholicism as the supreme faith of Mexico.

Priests in California seemed no less vigorous. In 1810, Father José Viader twice accompanied expeditions from Mission San José to capture Indian converts who had escaped. Viader draws no distinction between himself and the soldiers. In all instances, he indicates “we” to show he participated in every activity. On one expedition, Viader, “in the company of Lieutenant Gabriel Moraga, 23 other soldiers, and about 50 armed Christian Indians,” describes an attack on an Indian village to apprehend runaway neophytes. “We placed our people in position to attack a dance [being carried on] by heathen Indians and fugitive Christians,” he noted in his report. At dawn, the next day, “we assaulted a village . . . [and] . . . took it entire. The prisoners in all included 15 San José Christians, 18 heathen men, and 51 heathen women.”

In a few cases, priests commanded troops in the field, or at least seemed quite comfortable about conducting themselves as soldiers. In 1816, Father Juan Luís Martínez, rector of Mission San Luis Obispo, led an expedition into the southern part of California’s Central Valley. It is not clear how many men joined him, but whatever the number, they obeyed the priest’s orders to round up fugitive converts and pagan Indians so that they could learn of the “True God, without [whom] no one can live well or enjoy any good fortune.” Returning home, Martínez and his companions visited a village they had called upon during the first part of their journey. But the village had moved, and Martínez, who “was . . . astonished at their fickleness,” ordered his men to look for the settlement. When they found the village, the Indians attacked. Martínez is not clear about the succeeding chain of events, but he adds that the “next day the village was burned and everything in it destroyed because the people in it had taken up arms against those [the priest and his men] who had treated them well. . . . This village [deserved] severe punishment.”

In 1817, Father Narciso Durán, as rector at Mission San José, asked Governor Pablo de Solá for permission to pursue fugitive neophytes. Durán explained that his “breviary” and santo cristo (image of Jesus Christ) would serve, in Hubert Bancroft’s paraphrase, as “weapons.” In case these sacred instruments failed, Durán requested a cañónquito (little cannon) to convince the fugitives to return to the mission. Meanwhile, Father Xavier de la Concepción Uría demonstrated that he could acquit himself well in battle. During the Chumash rebellion in 1824, Uría, then rector at Mission Santa Inés, awoke from a nap as insurgents approached his quarters. A witness recalled he jumped out of bed and “shot and killed” two Indians with his shotgun. The exploits of bellicose priests and their contemporaries abided by patterns that long had presented war as a sacred endeavor. Given the practices bequeathed them by medieval Spain, the priests and settlers of California drew upon ideas that enabled them to define and overcome an enemy’s defiance. When contesting Indians and the pirate Hippolyte Bouchard, individuals who imperiled the very nature of their existence—Bouchard supposedly professed the atheism of the French Revolution and thus threatened the sanctity of religion—they consecrated war. But when the residents of Mexican
Spain established presidios in San Diego, Monterey (above), San Francisco, and Santa Barbara to hold California against foreign rivals and control the native populations. A number of presidio soldiers were assigned to the missions to protect the missionaries and civilians, discipline the neophytes, and bring back runaways.

In 1824, the Chumash Indians rebelled against Franciscan missionaries at Santa Barbara (right), Santa Ynez, and La Purísima Concepción. Soldiers from the Santa Barbara and Monterey presidios were sent to quell the revolt, including about 100 soldiers from Monterey who fought the natives at Mission Purísima Concepción with infantry, cavalry, and artillery after the Chumash’s nearly month-long occupation. As did their Spanish predecessors centuries before, troops in the field could compare their efforts in battle to a pilgrimage to atone for their sins.
California fought each other or the Americans in 1846, war lacked the sense of annihilation that inflamed the spirit.

Only battles against infidels required the services of pious warriors. When Father Palóu spoke about the establishment of Mission San Diego in 1769, he declared that “exactly as through the power of that sacred emblem the Spaniards had gained a great victory over the barbarous Moḥam-medans, in the year 1212, they [i.e., the priests] might also win a victory by raising the standard of the Holy Cross, and putting to flight all the army of hell, [and] bring under the subjection to the gentle yoke of our Holy Faith all the savage tribes . . . who inhabited . . . California.” Later, when Indian converts rebelled at Mission San Diego in 1775, Palóu praised a “blacksmith [who surpassed all other Spaniards in the fight] for without a doubt the Holy Communion which he had just received filled him with extraordinary courage and though he had no leather jacket to protect him he went out among the houses and shacks crying out, ‘Long live the Faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let these dogs of enemies die the death.’” When Bouchard raided settlements along the coast, Father Mariano Payeras, rector of Mission La Purísima Concepción, used terms that echoed the Muslims’ willingness to fight and die for their faith, writing: “Long live God, long live [our Catholic] religion, long live the king, long live the fatherland [in whose] precious defense we will conquer or die.”

The settlers used similar terms. Luis Arguello, when describing an expedition to recover fugitive neophytes, reported to the governor that he had confronted “heathen overwhelmed with error” whom God “has placed under the conquering banner of the most Catholic and pious monarch.” In the interest of “propagating our holy religion,” Arguello announced, “I am ready to sacrifice my comfort and my life and all the power of my mind.” When troops marched from Los Ange-
At times, an expedition was the consummate exercise whereby soldiers and militia repented of their sins and, at least for the moment, restored their place in the Christian community. In 1828, Sergeant Sebastian Rodríguez reported that during the hunt for fugitive converts, the soldiers twice heard Mass.81 The most sacred ceremony of the Catholic faith requires believers to confess their sins. According to the Latin Rite, which would be the liturgy followed by the residents of California, the congregation prays, “I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.” After the priest asks that “the Almighty and Merciful Lord grant us pardon . . . and [the] remission of our sins,” any person who wishes could receive Communion, and once more sit at the Lord’s table.82 Even Indians taken prisoner during these expeditions received the chance to repent. In 1837, José María Amador of San Jose led “soldiers and civilians” into the Central Valley to recover stolen horses. Of the two hundred Indians captured by the party, one hundred were fugitive neophytes, with the remainder being gentiles, or “heathen.” Amador told the Christian Indians to “pray the creed.” In other words, they could renounce sin by professing their faith. He then ordered their execution with “two arrows in the front and two in the back.” To make sure that the pagan Indians did not die in a state of sin, Amador “baptized” them and commanded his men to shoot the prisoners “in the back.”83

In the end, the way the priests and settlers used violence testifies to connections that span generations. Muslims in Spain conveyed certain practices to their Christian rivals, who then passed them to the settlers and colonists of the New World. Although rendered into Christian form, the Muslim ideas of jihad and ribat nonetheless possessed some of their original shape and intent. In some instances, war became a pilgrimage in which the warrior performed penance, and thus obtained the opportunity to fight his way into paradise. But if war is an act of faith, there come beguiling questions. Did the residents of California, like their predecessors in Spain, use religion to justify war? Or did they really think war was a form of religious expression? The answer to these questions depends on the reader’s approach to faith. But even so, the association of war with a pilgrimage addresses contemporary concerns. When one reads about Muslim militants invoking God to justify violence, or remembers that in 2003 an American president said that war would usher in a “New Age” and fulfill biblical prophecies, the priests and settlers of California sound quite modern.84 They are not, then, a remote populace lost to us through time and distance; rather, in their use of war they behaved as we do, sometimes repelled, sometimes emboldened, but all the while fascinated by the clarion call to muster ranks and fight.

**Michael Gonzalez** is an associate professor of history at the University of San Diego. He teaches California history, Chicano history, Cold War history, and Middle Eastern history and terrorism. He also is the director for the history master’s program.
JOAQUIN MILLER
AND THE SOCIAL CIRCLE
AT THE HIGHS

BY PHOEBE CUTLER

This verse from the poem “Columbus,” a few schools, a park, and an annual poetry series in Washington, D.C., are the visible remnants of the man who, at the turn of the last century, was arguably the most famous poet in America. Currently, Joaquin Miller is experiencing a mini-revival. A comprehensive Web site spans 166 years of his writing and ongoing bibliographical references. Two symposiums have been held, in Ashland in 2004 and in Redding in 2005. In 2013, following the launch of a three-year exhibition at the Mt. Shasta Sisson Museum, a third gathering will celebrate the centenary of the Poet of the Sierras’ death.²

Born in Indiana, raised in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, tested in the mountains of northern California and on the plains of Idaho and Montana, then feted in two European capitals, this backwoods scribe, at the age of nearly fifty, settled down in the hills behind Oakland.³ There, what his final, almost three decades lacked in an earlier adventurous life—Indian skirmishes, bear encounters, and frozen Pony Express rides—was compensated for by a whirl of activity of a different kind. Newly self-styled as a “fruit grower and poet,”⁴ Miller transformed seventy stony acres into a virtual forest and garden spectacle. With his pre-established reputation and continuing, prodigious, and varied output, the novice

Opposite: Joaquin Miller (ca. 1839–1913), celebrated western writer and public personality, found fame and influence across continents. In addition to his poems—a number of them written in his last decades, when this portrait was made—the self-promoting Poet of the Sierras wrote essays, fiction, plays, and autobiography. In 1879, the architect Arthur Gilman affirmed: “Almost every one of our leading American poets is of handsome or striking appearance. But none of them—the kindly-eyed Longfellow, the aged and Socratic Bryant, the brown-haired Lowell, the shaggy Whitman—is more noticeable on the street than Joaquin Miller.”

California Historical Society/USC Special Collections
rancher’s domain became an attraction for both the anonymous tourist and the aspiring artist. Witty, for the most part, gregarious, egoistic but also strongly idealistic, Joaquin Miller and his Hights—the name he gave his acreage—were major players in Oakland’s lively, turn-of-the-last-century cultural scene.

SOCIAL CLIMBING

When, in the spring of 1887, Miller purchased his piece of the Contra Costa hills, he was an acclaimed poet with multiple books and four plays to his name. At the age of ten, Cincinnatus Hiner Miller, as he was named, moved with his family from Libertyville, Indiana, to Oregon. Thirty years later and an aspiring writer, this child of the Wabash River and the Conestoga wagon became the sensation of the drawing rooms of London. Sporting long hair and a Wild West outfit of sombrero, scarlet shirt, scarf, and sash, the onetime gold miner, Indian fighter, Pony Express rider, newspaper publisher, and judge captivated the haute monde of Britain. A dozen years before William Cody’s Buffalo Bill show packaged the mythos, this self-called Byron of the Rockies introduced an old-world audience to the romance and adventure of the western frontier.

Having acquired his Oakland holding, Miller built a tiny log hut as temporary shelter. At this phase of his life, he would amass an amorphous total of three wives and seven, mostly absent, children (two, however, soon showed up, causing no end of trouble). His third spouse, Abbie Leland Miller, was back in New York, where, along with Newport or Saratoga Springs, she preferred to remain. Several factors eased Miller’s plan to settle permanently in northern California. Having lived in the Shasta/Siskiyou areas on and off between 1853 and 1859, he knew the wilds of that part of California. Subsequent visits to San Francisco in 1863, 1870, and again in 1871–72, combined with some early writing, had laid down tracks for an eventual return. In the 1870s and 1880s, his prodigious output during his residency in Europe and on the East Coast had distinguished this frontiersman as one of the West’s most prolific writers. Along with his adventurous life, in the sixteen years (1870–86) preceding his return, he had produced six books of poetry, four novels, two works of romanticized nonfiction, and ten plays, only two of which were actively produced. Of those two, The Danites in the Sierras was both a Broadway and a London success (it was performed in London by the first American troupe to travel abroad). Two collections of verse, Pacific Poems (London, 1871) and Songs of the Sierras (London and Boston, 1871), had even earned the Oregonian a California title, namely, Poet of the Sierras. All of this acclaim had the beneficial effect of securing Miller a job in advance of his arrival. Harr Wagner, the new editor of a revived Golden Era magazine, had offered the Washington, D.C.—based Miller the position of associate editor. This allowed him to pick up way ahead of where he left off. Miller’s cumulative achievements, combined with his bonhomie, made him a natural candidate for one of San Francisco’s leading social fraternities, the Bohemian Club. Founded in 1872 by a group of journalists, this society had expanded early on to include artists and their patrons. By 1888, Miller had joined Mark Twain, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Charles Warren Stoddard, and Ina Coolbrith as an honorary member. (His continuation in that status may be explained by both his early fame and his persistent state of penury.) According to an account by the neophyte journalist Elodie Hogan, this membership paid immediate dividends. A few of Miller’s club mates contributed their talents to the construction of the Abbey, the chapel-like cottage that the writer built for himself while living in the log hut at the Hights. One, possibly Martinez native and man-about-the-arts Bruce Porter, fashioned
At the Hights, Miller built four cabins: one for receiving guests, one for his brother, one for his mother, and one for sleeping and writing, which he called the Abbey (above), after his absent wife, Abbie Leland Miller, and Westminster Abbey, final resting place for many of Miller's heroes. The central room, or “chapel,” was Miller's office-cum-bedroom. The two wings on either side were the "deaneries," in one of which Miller regularly performed an Indian rain chant.

Miller transformed what had been rugged land into a forested slope with extensive rock walls, stone terracing, small ponds, numerous fountains, and a network of quixotic monuments, as detailed in this sketch by his daughter Juanita Miller (1880–1970). After his death, Juanita—described in a newspaper account as “beautiful and very unconventional”—sold souvenirs from one of the cabins and converted another into a sanctuary stocked with relics of her father.

Courtesy of Phoebe Cutler
the multicolored glass set in the two peaked windows adjoining the front door. Similarly, fellow Bohemian and sculptor Arthur Putnam could well have carved the rising sun, described as “an Aztec nimbus,” that sat above the door, while Putnam or another craftsman from the gregarious coterie contributed the scarlet cross that arose from the gable and the silver Moslem crescent on the door.8

The Bohemian Club provided Miller with a base in the city for drinking and socializing and, until the 1906 earthquake and fire demolished its building and the majority of its contents, a place to archive some of his papers. He participated in the “jinkses” that related to his own experience, such as the 1903 theatrical and musical evening honoring a companion of his London days, fellow miner and longtime rival Bret Harte. Five years later, he joined in a comparable celebration, the “Days of ’49,” with fellow performers “Sunset Norris” (Frank Norris of Octopus fame), “Sundown Field” (Charles K. Field, editor of Sunset magazine and Bohemian Club president from 1913 to 1914), and Arthur (repackaged as “Coyote”) Putnam.9

So much did the Poet of the Sierras enjoy his Bohemian experience that not long after its launch in 1904, he joined the Sequoia Club, society figure Ednah Robinson’s revival of a short-lived earlier group, a female response to the Bohemian Club.10 Uniquely for its time, the reorganized Sequoia Club integrated genders. Headed by Charles S. Aiken, editor of Sunset (and shortly to be Robinson’s husband), the Sequoia Club signaled its revival with a dinner at the St. Francis Hotel honoring the author Gertrude Atherton. Other receptions followed, along with concerts and art exhibits. Harr Wagner, who became Miller’s close associate and first biographer (and the Sequoia Club’s third president), commented that the poet was inspired to host a barbecue at his ranch for a hundred of his fellow Sequoians.11

Given the logistics of transport, entertaining one hundred guests at home would have been marginally more demanding than attending the San Francisco gatherings. The Bohemian schedule of performances at 9 p.m., with dinner following at 11, would have been a challenge for any member who wished to be home the same night, especially if that home happened to be in the hills behind the decorous suburb of Fruitvale and ten miles from the center of Oakland. With the last San Francisco–Oakland ferry leaving around midnight and connecting streetcars on the other side running only every hour, Miller could not have lingered long over dinner. In a few lines of a surviving note, he reassured a concerned friend that he did his “stint at the Bret Harte jinks, then caught the boat and walked up the hill to the Hights and slept in my own bear skins, as I told you I would.”12

As with almost everything connected with Miller, the facts, as related by both him and observers, are contradictory. However, almost all accounts concur in describing the hike up the “tawny hill” as a strenuous one. Commencing at the little settlement of Dimond at the intersection of Hopkins (now MacArthur) and Fruitvale Avenues, the purported length of the trip varied markedly depending on the age and fitness of the traveler. What was two miles for a couple of college students in 1892 was five for the author, publisher, and arts-and-crafts manufacturer Elbert Hubbard a decade later. At least by the time the two Baptist students attempted the trip, the electric Highland Park and Fruitvale line had replaced the horse-drawn Brooklyn and Fruit Vale (as the name of the suburb was originally spelled) streetcar and now extended from Fruitvale center to Dimond. But even under ideal circumstances—a private carriage driven all the way from City Hall at 14th and Broadway—the trip to the Heights was a two-hour trek.13 Usually Miller made good use of a horse and buckboard when commuting up and down his hill. Returning from San Francisco after the Bret Harte musicale, he made the best
In 1910, Frank C. Havens of Realty Syndicate purchased from his partner, Francis “Borax” Smith, the East Bay’s mass transit company. Included in the sale was this streetcar, featured in a 1911 postcard describing East 14th Street in Fruitvale as “the road of a thousand wonders.” Havens was now in charge of 13,000 acres—including the land surrounding the Hights—in the Berkeley-Oakland hills. For his part, Miller had joined the land rush as early as 1887, when he purchased several Oakland lots. By 1909, he was focusing his resources on that siren the eucalyptus, ordering and planting that year thousands of trees.

California Historical Society, CHS2012.1011.tif
of it, closing the aforementioned note with the description: “The little baby moon had gone to bed, but all the heaven was a pin cushion of gold-headed stars and I was neither lonely or leg weary: all this to show what the steps (?) and stairs (?) out door air will do for a fellows [sic] legs and lungs.”14

Although it lacked exact complements to the Bohemian and Sequoia Clubs, late-nineteenth-century Oakland could boast its share of fraternities. It was a town, in the words of its mayor, where “Science, art, and letters thrive[d]” along with “morality and general education.”15 In addition to upscale areas with “handsome and costly houses,” the Alameda County seat hosted sixteen educational establishments. The Vermont Miss Mary Snell, principal of the Snell Seminary, filled in as a patron of the city’s budding art scene. When the reformer Baroness Alexandra Gripenburg of Finland sought, in 1887, to meet the East Bay’s famous new resident, they rendezvoused at the seminary.16 In this way and in others, Miller improvised his social life on the Contra Costa side of the bay.

SPIRITUAL HEIGHTS

Above almost all else, the church was a unifying force in the middle-aged bard’s new northern California life. Although Miller claimed loyalty to no single religion, his father’s Quakerism and the fundamental Christian practice in the Willamette Valley of his youth strongly shaped his outlook and his writing. (The Bible, he frequently asserted, was the only reference book he needed.) Halfway up the hill on the trail that led to his private cemetery, he erected the Bishop’s Gate, honoring William Taylor, Methodist bishop, powerful gold rush preacher, and heroic missionary to Africa. What would have further attracted Miller, Taylor enjoyed a reputation as one of the first, if not the first, importer of eucalyptus to California.17

Simultaneously with Miller settling at his ranch was the establishment of the Unitarian Church’s first East Bay branch. Known as a sect with advanced views and led by a succession of dynamic ministers, the First Unitarian Church of Oakland attracted a distinguished congregation.18 Although Miller habitually spent his Sundays propped up at work in the big brass bed that doubled as his office, he formed strong ties to the church’s Reverend Charles W. Wendte, his successor William Day Simonds, the free-floating Reverend Benjamin Fay Mills, and, even more importantly, two of the church’s staunchest parishioners, Charles J. Woodbury and John P. Irish.

Son of a German immigrant and a gifted leader who grew up in Boston and San Francisco, Wendte established twelve new Unitarian churches in a six-year period during his stay in Oakland. To a large degree self-educated, he promoted literature as well as music during these years (1886–98) in the burgeoning town.19 True to the liberal outlook of his chosen denomination, he offered the pulpit of the newly built First Unitarian Church to both the radical feminist Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Indian mystic Swami Vivekananda, founder of the Vedanta Society. Under his aegis, a fundraiser for a memorial to a deceased poet drew almost a complete complement of writers from the area. On another occasion, Miller sat by bemused while an embarrassed Unitarian from across the bay parodied his versifying.20

Relocated to southern California by 1904, Rev. Mills was less a literary figure and more a spirited reformer with a socialist agenda. Miller, whose writing inveighed against the evils of unfettered capitalism (ignoring his own inveterate land speculations), enjoyed an easy rapport with Mills. Elbert Hubbard recalled the Hights proprietor waylaying him and the minister during a visit. Miller had appeared from the trees...
From 1894 to 1910, Irish held the sine-cure (which earned him the title of Colonel) of Naval Officer of Customs, Port of San Francisco. He never gave up farming, eventually operating a thousand acres near Bakersfield. In the penultimate year of his life, he made a triumphant visit to Japan, where he was received as a hero, since he had campaigned ardently against Asian discrimination laws. He was greeted by Yone Noguchi, a member of the Japanese parliament, who, as a stowaway at age thirteen, wandered into West Oakland and the Irish home. The family took him in and educated him. According to the lore, this future parliamentarian was the first Japanese the Iowa native had ever seen.

The Irrepressible John P. Irish . . . Colonel

John P. Irish was a dervish. Prior to arriving in California in 1882 at the age of thirty-nine, he had trained as a lawyer, served two terms in the Iowa legislature, run for governor, and been publisher of the Iowa State Press. Within six or seven years of arriving in Oakland, he became editor and chief owner of the Oakland Times and the last managing editor of San Francisco’s venerable Daily Alta.1 Within that same period, he served on a committee to oversee the Southern Pacific, led another committee to overhaul the city’s sewer system, and was elected head of the West Oakland Improvement Association. Simultaneously, he shared responsibility for the Home for the Adult Blind and the Women’s Sheltering and Protective Home. In sum, for the next forty years, he was ubiquitous as a civic leader, writer, and speaker.

Large, with an oversized head, and (later) flowing white hair—and always without a tie—this public figure poured himself into conservative causes. He opposed women’s right to vote, Prohibition, and the ceding of Yosemite to the federal government. He campaigned nationwide against silver and for the gold standard. Ambrose Bierce, not a fan of Irish, nevertheless recognized, in a backhanded way, his omnipresence:

“Ah, no, this is not Hell,” I cried;
“The preachers ne’er so greatly lied.
“This is Earth’s spirit glorified!

“Good souls do not in Hades dwell,
“And, look, there’s John P. Irish!”
“Well, The Voice said,
“that’s what makes it Hell.”

From 1894 to 1910, Irish held the sine-cure (which earned him the title of Colonel) of Naval Officer of Customs, Port of San Francisco. He never gave up farming, eventually operating a thousand acres near Bakersfield. In the penultimate year of his life, he made a triumphant visit to Japan, where he was received as a hero, since he had campaigned ardently against Asian discrimination laws. He was greeted by Yone Noguchi, a member of the Japanese parliament, who, as a stowaway at age thirteen, wandered into West Oakland and the Irish home. The family took him in and educated him. According to the lore, this future parliamentarian was the first Japanese the Iowa native had ever seen.
intoning, “The collection will now be taken.” He then welcomed the entrepreneurial Hubbard, declaring, “Ben said you were coming, but preachers are such damn liars.”

Given the centrality of religion to the social and literary life of early Alameda County, it is apt that Miller’s first documented social outing was sponsored by Charles and Lucia Woodbury in the summer of 1887. The Woodburys invited the poet, the Irishes, and the Wendtes to meet the simpatico Reverend John K. McLean and his wife of the Congregational Church. Charles’s ties with the Unitarian sect came naturally. Born in Massachusetts, but raised partially in Michigan, he returned to his native state to attend Williams College, where he became a disciple of the eminent thinker and onetime Unitarian minister, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Their acquaintance lasted on and off for five years. At the time of his Oakland entertainment, Woodbury, head of a growing family and president of a varnish company, was writing a book about his life-changing relationship with Emerson twenty years earlier. For the remainder of his life, besides playing the violin and penning the occasional religious poem and book review, this devout Unitarian gave lectures on the Concord philosopher and his circle.

It was to this learned patriarch’s warm and welcoming household that Miller repaired—“wet, dripping, draggled, muddy hands and face, torn clothes, and worn-out body and mind from my long walk and contact with wire fences”—en route to speak at the First Presbyterian Church. Along with his fire and “sundry cups of hot tea,” Miller, in kind with the audiences who gathered for his friend’s talks, would have valued Woodbury’s New England associations. During one of his several trips to Boston, he wrote Abbie and their daughter, Juanita, that he had visited Longfellow’s grave and was going to the “classic ground” of Concord and Lexington.

The three compatriots—Woodbury, Irish, and Miller—arrived in California about the same time. Although all were individuals of some significance, Woodbury was, for the most part, a private figure. Miller, a prolific writer with a national reputation to maintain, required a degree of isolation to do his work. In contrast, Irish, the poet’s most intimate ally, was 95 percent in the public eye. Now forgotten but at the time judged one of California’s “most picturesque public figures,” he deserves separate treatment.

**LITERARY LIAISONS**

Keeping very quiet, for understandable reasons, about her religious preferences (she was the daughter of the younger brother of Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism), Ina Coolbrith was judged by Harr Wagner as Miller’s closest literary friend. Without a doubt, she was his longest-running female friend. This much-esteemed figure in the California pantheon of writers was a beautiful young woman of twenty-nine when the Indiana-born poet first met her in 1870 during the second of his early visits to San Francisco. Miller had come to her attention the previous year with the receipt at the *Overland Monthly* offices of the slim book of verse *Joaquin, et al.* A divorcée and transplant from Los Angeles, Coolbrith, herself a contributor to the journal, urged editor Bret Harte to review the curious submission from the backwoods Oregon judge. When, following the review’s appearance, Miller himself arrived at the journal’s offices, Coolbrith kindly took charge of the newcomer. Almost twenty years later, still single and guardian to her orphaned niece and nephew, she lived in a modest house on Webster Street, not far from her job as Oakland’s—and the state’s—first public librarian.

Miller owed this attractive colleague more than one debt. He was en route to greater arenas of glory when he spent a day with Coolbrith gathering olive branches in Marin County to make a
Ina Coolbrith (1841–1928), one of the Bay Area’s most prominent literary figures, met Miller when she was about twenty-nine, when this studio portrait was made. Coolbrith and Miller were bound by their shared Conestoga wagon past, Midwest origins, long acquaintance, involvement with literature, and unconventional single states. That closeness did not preclude Coolbrith from complaining that Miller did not credit her for his changed name and had reneged on his promise to provide her housing on his hill.

OAKLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY, PHOTOGRAPH BY LOUIS THORS
wreath for Byron’s grave. At this juncture, she convinced the aspiring poet to change his name from Cincinnatus to Joaquin, in honor of the fabled Mexican bandit and Miller’s poem in the just-reviewed, eponymous book.27 When two years later, Miller—now returned from Britain—was notified that the half-Wintun daughter he had fathered thirteen or fourteen years earlier and had left behind in Shasta County needed to be rescued from a bad situation, he arranged for the teenager to reside with Coolbrith. Callie lived with her mentor—part of the time as a quasi-domestic—for an extended period. The two formed a strong bond.28

Until she moved back to San Francisco in 1899, Coolbrith was one of the anchors of the East Bay’s literary life. Well known is the help she gave to a disadvantaged and youthful Jack London. Less known is her support of more established writers, in particular George Wharton James. This restless young Brit, a minister by training, arrived with his family in 1887 (coincidentally the same year Miller put down stakes in the hills just to the south) for an almost two-year stay in Oakland. At the beginning of a remarkable writing career that spanned mental well-being, the Grand Canyon, the Southwest Indians, and southern California, James was offered a small loan by Coolbrith, who also wrote the introduction to one of his first literary efforts, a manual on physiology for youth. Extending her graciousness even further, she took her new friend to the Hights, the first of James’s many visits over the next two and a half decades.29

Coolbrith introduced two other literary figures to the frontier poet: the New York poet and painter Edmund Russell and the Rhode Island–raised, utopian reformer Charlotte Perkins Gilman. Russell spent six months in San Francisco and Oakland in the early 1890s, during which time he was inspired to compile an anthology of contemporary California poetry. During her longer Oakland stay, from 1891 to 1894, Gilman published her still-admired, semiautobiographical short story, The Yellow Wallpaper. The grandniece of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Harriet’s brother, the fiery (and scandal-tainted) Reverend Henry Beecher, Gilman’s impecunious state required her to take charge of a boardinghouse directly across from Coolbrith’s household.30 Here, this remarkable woman composed poetry, fiction, and nonfiction for at least five different journals and newspapers; lectured; and engaged in social protest (sanitation, temperance, kindergartens, unemployment). For some of this time, she tended a dying mother (Swedenborgian minister Joseph Worcester visited and advised her to get help). And, for almost all of it, she looked after a young daughter.31 Gilman may have been singular in her productivity, but she stood out as being one of the few women who was utterly resistant to the bard’s spell.

A stalwart daughter of Presbyterian New England, Gilman confided her disgust with Miller to her diary, calling him a “dirty person.” The high-minded Gilman also expressed her contempt in her description of the scene that George Wharton James, a less-exacting Methodist, was delighted to capture for the ages four years later: both visitors had discovered the writer in his standard working position, in bed, but, in Charlotte’s case, with a cigar, whose ashes he carelessly dropped on the floor.32

HILLSIDE BOHEMIA

Gilman—her scorn not withstanding—and James were welcome guests at the Hights. Torrents of curiosity seekers were not. The bard railed against the “lion-hunters” who would “purloin his manuscripts, steal his books, peer through his windows, and even carry off his coats, gloves and handkerchiefs.” The incident inciting this outburst was the appearance of four female “pilgrims to the shrine of poesy,” who steadfastly refused to acknowledge Miller’s attempt to take his “rapidly cooling” bath.33
When directed toward his friends, Miller’s hospitality was warm and welcoming. He appeared to entertain effortlessly. Among his long list of prior occupations was that of cook for a camp of gold miners. Even his estranged Native American daughter conceded that her father was a good chef. The importance Miller assigned to food and meals was indicated in James’s description of his first visit with Coolbrith to the Hights. James “solemnized his heart” when the poet at last revealed the “holy of holies,” pulling back a pair of beautiful Persian shawls to expose his greasy stove and kitchen table. His protégée and live/work assistant Yone Noguchi cited his pronouncements, “Remember this is a sacred service” and “Eat slowly, think something higher and be content.”

In pursuit of this contentment and in kind with its neighboring hardscrabble ranches, the Hights had its complement of cows and chickens. The resourceful and frequently cash-strapped poet foraged for greens and shot local game and fowl. He fussed over his three small purpose-built ponds that provided fish and frogs. “Every available place” was “planted to corn and vegetables,” while the roadside, as writer and traveler Charles Warren Stoddard described the drive from Dimond, yielded watercress.\(^\text{35}\) Noguchi recalled Miller heading out to bag a quail for his mother’s breakfast but returning with a sparrow. One guest was disappointed that he was served not the promised pheasant, but “wild geese fresh from the wheat field.” He was lucky compared to the easterners for whom Jack London prepared rattlesnake under the guise of rabbit.\(^\text{36}\)
Neither pheasant nor geese could have been all that plentiful, because by all accounts the most common meal for entertaining purposes was Miller’s “bandit luncheon,” a meat stew with onions and vegetables cooked in a large pot over an open fire for two to three hours. A variation was the “Hungarian bandit luncheon,” a kebob of small steak, bacon, and a slice of onion on skewers.37 From the early 1890s, when the Hights began to welcome a steady stream of both transient and resident Japanese, the cuisine diversified to include tea and sushi. Goose or kebob, these meals took place among the redwoods in the canyon along Palo Seco Creek on the property’s northern border, or near the Abbey under what was variously described as an arbor, an arbor with roses, or “a bower of white roses.” In unseasonable weather, the repasts were moved a dozen yards east to Margaret Miller’s, Joaquin’s mother’s, winter cottage.38

The guest list of one such bandit lunch combined Berkeley artist William Keith and his wife; the author Cora Older, wife of local editor and reformer Fremont Older; the author Bailey Millard, at the time in between San Francisco and New York editing jobs; and resident artist and aristocrat the Hungarian count Geyza S. de Perhacs. All during his Oakland period, but especially in the early 1990s when he was a stringer, Miller drew heavily from his acquaintances among the contributors and staff at the venerable San Francisco Morning Call (after 1895, the San Francisco Call). One dinner was prefaced by a pitcher of water containing one of Miller’s stocks of goldfish, described by guest and Call “auditor” Howard Hurlbut, a would-be poet and recent sojourner among the Crow Indians. Also in attendance were Ethel Brandon, a local leading lady, and her sister, a poetry contributor to the Call. To honor the departing New Yorker Edmund Russell, Upper Fruitvale’s most prominent host again called upon poets, in this instance Edwin Markham, David Lesser Lezinsky, and Coolbrith.39

Although Miller was inclined toward more intimate entertaining, near the end of his presence in Fruitvale Heights he also annually held what he called Whitaker Day, in honor of Herman “Jim” Whitaker, his wife, and their seven children.40 The son of English wool manufacturers, Whitaker had arrived in Oakland in 1895. He worked odd jobs while moving his family from one cheap immigrant neighborhood to another. Eventually, this close confere of Miller’s was to enjoy success with his novel The Planter, an exposé of conditions on Mexican rubber plantations.

Superficially, Whitaker shared much in common with John Herbert Evelyn Partington, another intimate. Both men were British, Oakland-based, and the father of seven children. The resemblance ended there, however, because Partington, a graphic artist, had a going business, a school for newspaper illustration. Also, in contrast with Whitaker’s earthier progeny, the Partington children were destined to become artists of one kind or another. Gertrude painted Miller’s portrait. Blanche and Richard were familiar figures at the Hights. Blanche, the Call’s drama and cultural critic and a much-admired beauty, was a confidante of Ambrose Bierce and a source of romantic interest for Noguchi.41 Until the quake wreaked havoc with the city’s theaters and art schools, young Dick worked at the family’s San Francisco school. Afterward, he ran the art gallery that real estate developers Francis Marion “Borax” Smith and Frank Havens opened in the upscale suburb of Piedmont.

As Havens’s nephew and right-hand man, George Sterling would have been instrumental in securing the gallery position for Dick. A would-be poet, Sterling was the dashing, unannounced leader of a group of young men that included Dick, Ambrose Bierce’s younger son, Leigh, and the journalist Austin Lewis, who along with Bierce’s brother Albert and his son Carleton were regular imbibers of Miller’s store of 110 proof.
From their doings arise some of the more colorful anecdotes regarding life at the Hights. Sterling, a genuine fan of Miller’s poetry, recalled Miller’s insistence on demonstrating his skill with a tomahawk, an expertise he claimed had often saved his life during his Shasta days. Fueled with “an appreciable amount of moonshine,” the bard flung the hatchet at a tree four times, each time missing his target. After the fifth attempt, he hit the tree with the butt end of the handle. Commenting on this incident, Miller biographer M. M. Marberry surmised that the poet, who was famously resistant to the effects of alcohol, most likely had never thrown a tomahawk before.42

A busy Socialist (and onetime candidate for governor), Austin Lewis would not have been one of the more frequent denizens of the Hights, but even he recalls the group’s rollicking picnics. From an orchard in Piedmont, the picnickers would progress over the hills to Fruitvale. Lewis, one of Sterling’s three boyhood pals who followed him from Long Island, recalled that in a quarry near Miller’s they would discuss “the affairs of the universe” and listen “to the rhapsodical lies of the old bard.”43

Visits to the Hights were not all whiskey and talk. Miller’s friends sometimes helped with the ranch work. One well-circulated photograph circa 1909 depicts Miller supervising Whitaker and two
By 1893, the Oregon-bred poet had penned “Columbus” (“Sail on! Sail on! and on!”). . . . His “shelf of the mountain” was slowly beginning to resemble the “hillside Bohemia” he had been bruiting about since the early 1890s.

By 1893, the Oregon-bred poet had penned “Columbus” (“Sail on! Sail on! and on!”), the verses that would, on October 12 each year, make him the bane of at least two generations of children. His “shelf of the mountain” was slowly beginning to resemble the “hillside Bohemia” he had been bruiting about since the early 1890s. One of the first to arrive was his disciple Edwin Markham. As early as 1888, a solitary Miller had written to Markham in Placerville in an effort to attract a sympathetic and muscular workmate to the barren hillside he termed a “doleful, growsome [sic] place.”45 Four years later, after the electrification of the tram line, Markham, who for about three years had been living downtown near the Oakland elementary school where he was principal, moved within a half-mile of the Hights.46 There, in 1899, he produced “Man with the Hoe,” one of the most popular and lucrative poems of all times.

About the time Markham took the job in Oakland, the first of Miller’s long line of Japanese youths began to appear. They were of two kinds, well-to-do students on their way home from Ivy League colleges and poorer young men who may have been working elsewhere in menial jobs. Both types raised the ire of the locals. (In his rambling semiautobiography, The Building of the City Beautiful, Miller described a confrontation with a “committee for the protection of white labor,” whose threats forced some of the early live/work residents to leave.47) Elbert Hubbard, recalling his late 1902 visit, reported on the effect of these outlanders on the rough slopes above Dimond: “Soon a whole little village smiled upon us from a terraced outlook, that seemed surrounded and shut in by tall pines. The houses were about as large as dry goods cases—say eight by twelve. There were a dozen of them . . . of all sorts and color and shapes.”48

Musing on the same sight, Jim Whitaker’s daughter Elsa remembered visiting “the beautiful little Japanese paper houses up through the woods.” She described them as “well made” and mostly composed of paper.49 Hubbard was met by “an Oriental, all dressed in white,” who escorted him to his cottage. On his one and only stay at the Hights, Charles Warren Stoddard, a founder with Coolbrith and Harte of the Overland
The following year brought Takeshi Kanno, the longest, most continuous Japanese inhabitant. A self-styled philosopher, Kanno was to become embroiled in two scandals: his interracial marriage to the sculptress Gertrude Boyle and her desertion of him for one of his much younger countrymen. This regrettable fate, including his eventual remarriage with Boyle, has not been sufficient to win lasting fame for the luckless Kanno.

Monthly, marveled at the cultural attainments of these young Asians, who “talked freely” of “Emerson, Wordsworth, Longfellow, of Shakespeare” and also of Bunyan, “Victor Hugo, Walt Whitman, and even Bernard Shaw.” In addition, they were more versed in Russian literature than were their American equivalents.

In contrast to the passing students, the Japanese live/work servants were indispensable to the Hights’s operation. Speaking to a reporter in the spring of 1895, Margaret Miller referred to the “two young Japanese” who had been “living with us here for a long time receiving instruction in English from Joaquin.” A more accurate description of the pedagogy would be Miller’s encapsulation of his relationship with Yone Noguchi, who arrived in the spring of 1895 and stayed for five years: “This boy is the right sort; he does just as he pleases—lives in the cabin yonder. I never go into it. Sometimes he comes in here and we talk of men and books.”

Although honored to be at the famed Hights, Noguchi and his peers were essentially houseboys. However, unlike their comrades elsewhere, they received no compensation (Noguchi stated that the only object he received from his host were two pairs of woolen socks to replace his tattered ones). A revealing photo (page 56) of Miller with three Japanese youths and two horses (unusual among archival photos of casual scenes in that it bears a specific date, June 6, 1891) gives a sense of their status. In this image, the poet is every bit the proud ranch owner. One arm is tossed casually over his horse. Two of the Japanese hold the horses. A third looks out shyly from behind Miller. The front steps of the Abbey appear to the right and in the distance are a lordly view of Fruitvale’s eponymous orchards and a snatch of County Road #2509. The “fruit grower and poet,” as he had once again listed himself in the local directory, is showing off his steeds, his servants, and his domain.

In 1893, student-laborer Yonejiro (Yone) Noguchi (1875–1947) took up residence at the Hights, where he began his English literary career and embarked, in 1897, on a correspondence with Charles Warren Stoddard. This autographed portrait, made on July 4, 1897, was one of three he sent to Stoddard, each posed in western rather than Japanese dress, a preference acknowledged by Miller during Noguchi’s almost decades-long residence in the United States. Noguchi, Miller explained to the San Francisco Chronicle, “objects to that sort of interest, saying that he wants to write for America, and depend solely on the value of his work.”

Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

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Of Miller’s Japanese residents, wrote Charles Warren Stoddard, “Never were gentler souls than these who have found a welcome and a shelter at The Heights.” Miller himself confessed enjoying their “exquisite refinement . . . their willingness and eagerness to add in some way to your comfort and pleasure; their delicacy and reserve,” attributes that “make them a model for every nation under the sun!” On their part, Miller observed, the “open little houses here and the meditative life among the flowers and birds remind them all the time of beautiful, beautiful Japan.”

The Japanese poet-philosopher Takeshi Kanno (1877–n.d.) married Gertrude Boyle (1876–1937), Miller’s portrait sculptor of choice, in 1907. In this 1914 photograph, the Kannos are performing Takeshi’s 1913 “vision drama,” Creation Dawn. Gertrude described Takeshi’s affinity to the Heights as “a spot in harmony with the meditative spirit so strong within him. . . . Here he has remained in the silence of dream, sunk deep in the ocean-thought of the universe; anon awakening to whisper his fancies, his sea-murmurings, to the soft breezes, to voice his soul-dreams to my ear.”

Library of Congress
Kanno lived at the Hights for over ten years, writing one poem and a “vision drama,” with very limited exposure. In contrast, within a year of moving to the Hights, Noguchi produced idiosyncratic poetry that created a small sensation. His efforts were collected into *Seen and Unseen, or A Monologue of a Homeless Snail* (1897), the first and only book to emerge from Gelett Burgess and Porter Garnett’s Bohemian Press. By the time he returned to Japan in 1904, having left the Hights some four years earlier, Noguchi had published four books (and fathered the sculptor Isamu Noguchi). Repatriated, he established himself as one of the reigning authorities on English literature. Today his accomplishments are the subject of an extensive Web site, the object of study in courses on Asian Americans, and material for an exhibition at the Oakland Asian Cultural Center.

Ironically, of all the once-prominent literati who gathered at Miller’s bastion, this penniless quasi-servant is arguably the most feted. Noguchi was the comet whose tail still shimmers: the first Japanese to compose poems in English, a talented crafter of words, and a pioneer in bringing Western literature to Asian shores. The lesser lights who were drawn to the Oregonian’s “steeps and heaps of stones” for the most part could just watch. They, however, did their service stoking the numerous publications that made San Francisco a West Coast literary center at the turn of the last century. John P. Irish, George Sterling, Herbert Bashford, George Wharton James, Henry Meade Bland, Harr Wagner, Charles Warren Stoddard, Bailey Millard, and more—Miller’s boon companions—were the writers and editors of *Sunset*, *Overland Monthly*, and *Golden Era* magazines and the city’s four principal newspapers. Drawn to the Hights by its owner’s esprit, they sunned themselves in his larger-than-life personality, drank his whiskey, and chawed his barbecue. Some—Bland, Wagner, and the newspaper editor and poet Alfred James Waterhouse—even lived there for different periods.

Not only writers gathered at the Hights. The fiery Xavier Martinez, first painting teacher at the California Academy of Arts and Crafts in Oakland (later the California College of Arts and Crafts), came with and without his wife, Elsa Whitaker. Gertrude Boyle Kanno was one of the most talented artists to take up residency. A refugee from the 1906 earthquake, she moved there when her studio (at the same Pine Street address as the Partington School) was destroyed. Boyle was the sculptor of choice for the *eminences grises* of the day, including Edwin Markham, John Muir, Joseph LeConte, and, of course, Miller.

Miller was the “center of our solar system,” Charles Stoddard reported, describing the dullness that followed his absence from the ranch. Ambrose Bierce, who may not have worked on the stone monuments but who was known to join family members on excursions into the hills, conceded that Miller was “as great-hearted
The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám

In late 1903 or early 1904, Miller was asked to pose for photographer Adelaide Marquand Hanscom’s (1875–1931) illustrated version of the classic selection of poems, the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (left).

In a 1906 interview, Hanscom described waiting for Miller’s reply: “We had about given up on hope, thinking he had ignored us entirely, when one day a tall, long bearded, long haired and long coated old man came into our studio and, without waiting to introduce himself, extended both his hands above our heads and said, ‘Bless you, my children, bless you.’ He then took each in turn by the hand, bowed low, and kissed the fingertips. It is a ceremony, we soon learned, that he seldom omits.”

The poet Charles Keeler (1871–1937) also posed for Hanscom (right). Keeler, she recalled, “hazarded his life by sitting upon the edge of an upturned circular table pouring, or imagining he was pouring, bubbles from a huge, heavy brass bowl. It was the only available thing I could make to represent this big, round earth of ours.”

Courtesy of Michael Shreve; www.michaelshreve.com
London died two years after that. The same year as Miller’s demise, Sterling went on a binge and his wife initiated a divorce. By 1919, Whitaker was dead in New York. Despite this disintegration, the Poet of the Sierras’ influence among the community lived on. In 1909, a group had formed the California Writers Club with Austin Lewis as president. Incorporating on February 28, 1913, the association adopted a ship as its logo and Sail On, from Miller’s poem “Columbus,” as its motto. In 1919, Oakland’s parks department acquired most of the Hights, which became Joaquin Miller Park, where for thirty years the California Writers Club held memorial activities, culminating in 1941 in the building of a 1,400-foot-long, Italian-style cascade using stone brought from the Sierra. Miller would have been pleased.

The death of the flamboyant author received national recognition. His reputation had been building since his, to many Americans, inexplicable acclaim abroad in the 1870s. By 1893, the log cabin he had built and lived in for two years—near the White House—was on exhibit at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Distinguished in the eyes of his neighbors and others by his outlandish dress and self-prepared funeral pyre, Miller was viewed as an eccentric, but no Bay Area literary event was complete without him. One local organizer seeking his presence at an industrial exposition addressed Miller as Oakland’s “bright, particular star” (the “star” agreed to lecture; his chosen topic: “The Size of the Dollar”).

By early 1915, various women’s groups were leading a campaign to preserve the Hights. In 1917, Abbie, encouraged in her negotiations by John P. Irish, settled on a price with the city of Oakland for the Hights while securing lifetime tenure for herself and a quarter acre for Juanita. Joaquin Miller Park was duly the largest of Oakland’s parks for years to come.
“Some day I shall sit down and not get up any more,” Miller wrote John P. Irish in a “directory letter” in 1889. “I want to leave my ashes on my ‘Hights,’ among the trees I have planted, and I want you to see to it that my body is burned on my tomb here; and quietly, secretly if necessary. Let no one meddle. It should be of far less concern to the world than the planting of one of my thousands of trees.” On May 23, 1913, three months after Miller’s publicly celebrated funeral, members of San Francisco’s Bohemian and Press Clubs gathered to burn the urn containing the poet’s ashes, scattering them about his beloved Hights.

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley
The 1920s witnessed the first signs of a reassessment of the poet’s merit. Despite his wife and daughter’s best efforts to fan the altar flame, a University of Illinois professor conducting research during the summer of 1921 for a compendium of Joaquin’s poems could find no copies of any of Miller’s books in a dozen Bay Area bookshops. This neglect presaged an opening fusillade on the frontier bard’s reputation. Concurrently, the Hights was falling into a state of disrepair. A journalist visiting it in 1923 described the Abbey’s broken windows and wide-swinging doors, Margaret Miller’s cottage on the verge of collapse, the stone monuments vandalized, great trees felled, and the acacia thickets “ruthlessly cut away.” Resisting this decline of home and reputation, one or two of Miller’s best-known verses would habitually appear, at least until the 1950s, in American poetry anthologies.

While a handful of poems lived on, the prolific writer’s journalism more or less died with him. Yet Miller, more than one biographer acknowledges, regarded his prose more highly than his poetry. Indeed, journalism came easily to him. In Oregon in the early 1860s, he ran two short-lived newspapers. Throughout his career, he was writing constantly about his travels, initially in personal diaries and, later, on assignment for newspapers. His outspoken prose—both frank and moralistic—was spiked with humor and country argot. With the same brio with which he confronted swindlers and marauding indigenous people in the Sierra, he lambasted crooked land speculators and irresponsible politicians.

One of his early pet complaints was the deplorable condition of Oakland’s roads. In a characteristically exaggerated account of a real event, he described his attempt to give a lecture in the neighboring settlement of Walnut Creek. Confronting the men who had invited him to speak with the lack of passable roads and his inability to walk due to prior war injuries, Miller was asked if he could swim: “Yes.” “Then swim to Contra Costa,” he was advised. “Splendid good swimming all the way. Take the water at the San Francisco wharf, swim the bay of San Francisco, then the San Pablo Bay, then Suisun Bay, then up the Sacramento river, then up Walnut Creek to the schoolhouse, where the committee will be out on the porch with banners and bands to receive you.”

Miller’s blend of candor and the vernacular enjoyed wide appeal. Besides the New York–based Independent, two other journals, the Chicago Times and the San Francisco Call, regularly carried his byline. With the wide proliferation of Miller’s poetry and his prose, the hospitality of his barbecues, and the eccentricity of his ranchero life and appearance, it is not surprising that the Hights and its environs became, by the 1890s, a habitation for area artists and a destination for visiting celebrities and local curiosity seekers. When Elbert Hubbard and Benjamin Fay Mills descended from the tram that terminated in the little settlement of Dimond, the conductor counseled them, “Take that road and sail on.” “He smiled,” Hubbard recalled, “in a way that indicated that he had sprung the allusion before and was pleased with it.”

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COURTSHIP AND CONQUEST: ALFRED SULLY’S INTIMATE INTRUSION AT MONTEREY, BY STEPHEN G. HYSLOP, PP 4–17


6 Letter of June 14, 1849, Alfred Sully Papers, Western Americana Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter cited as Alfred Sully Papers); Sully, No Tears for the General, 47–48; Beebe and Senkewicz, Testimonios, 193–97.


8 Letter of May 1, 1850, Alfred Sully Papers; Sully, No Tears for the General, 57, 85, 239–40 n. 5.

9 Letters of May 28, 1850, and Aug. 28, 1850, Alfred Sully Papers; Sully, No Tears for the General, 61–63, 237 n. 3.


12 Letter of Apr. 30, 1851, Alfred Sully Papers.

13 Letter of June 14, 1849, Alfred Sully Papers; Sully, No Tears for the General, 42.

14 Letter of June 1851, Alfred Sully Papers; Sully, No Tears for the General, 72–73.

15 Alfred Robinson acknowledged that mission Indians were subjected to severe discipline but regarded plans to emancipate them and secularize the missions, undertaken by José María Echeandía and later governors of Mexican California, as misguided assaults on what conscientious padres with whom he did business had accomplished at their religious communities. “These flourishing institutions, as they had been, were in danger of immediate subversion and ruin,” Robinson wrote in Life in California before the Conquest (San Francisco: Thomas C. Russell, 1925 [1846]), 129. For a contrasting assessment of the mission system by an American who traded with Californios but did not enter into their society, see William Dane Phelps, Alta California, 1840–1842: The Journal and Observations of William Dane Phelps, Master of the Ship ‘Alert,’ ed. Briton Cooper Busch (Glendale, Calif.: Arthur H. Clark, 1983), 197–98.


17 Sully, No Tears for the General, 150–51.


*WITH THE GOD OF BATTLES I CAN DESTROY ALL SUCH VILLAINS*: WAR, RELIGION, AND THE IMPACT OF ISLAM ON SPANISH AND MEXICAN CALIFORNIA, 1769–1846, BY MICHAEL GONZALEZ, PP 18–39


The lines describe Othello’s mission to confront a Turkish fleet bearing down on Cyprus.

Some commentators may insist that Muslims still see jihad as a religious obligation. There is no need to enter the controversy. Commentary in the text and in the notes will provide sufficient explanation about the function of jihad in history.


4 Verse 1:1.7, Al-Muwatta, http://bewley.virtualave.net/muwcont.html, also see, the version of the Muwatta at http://www.sultan.org/books/Muatta.pdf. All references to the Muwatta come from these versions.

5 Hubert Howe Bancroft, The History of California, 7 vols. (San Francisco: The History Company, 1885), 2:223. The speaker is Pablo de la Guerra, resident of Santa Barbara.

6 Ibid., 2:236.


9 Some may say we even misunderstand Franciscan devotion. To put the matter bluntly, they did not want to kill so much as they wanted to be killed and earn the martyr’s crown. For further discussion on Franciscan spirituality in the New World, see John Leddy Phelan, The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). Also see Jacques Lafaye, Quetzalcoatl and Guadalupana: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, tr. Benjamin Keen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).


13 For further discussion see, Carmen Martínez Salvador, “Sobre la entidad de la rhiba andaluza omeya, una cuestión de terminología: Ribat, Rabita y Zawiyya,” in El ribat califal: Excavaciones y estudios, 173–89, esp. 176–86.


notes

14 Dodds, Menocal, and Balbale, The Arts of Intimacy, 130. For more examples of Almoravid fervor, see Alejandro García-Sanjuán, “Jews and Christians in Almoravid Seville as Portrayed by the Islamic Jurist Ibn ‘Abdun,” Medieval Encounters 14 (2008): 78–80, esp. 82. On another note, the word Almoravid may come from the Arabic al-Murabidun, meaning “those bound together” or “those who perform ribat.”
18 By no means do we wish to promote the idea that Islam is a faith dedicated to war. Other commentators, though, have no trouble making the claim. See Pamela Geller, Stop the Islamization of America: A Practical Guide to the Resistance (Washington, DC: WNDBooks, 2011), and Robert Spencer, The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam (and the Crusades) (Washington, DC: Regnery Press, 2005). Mr. Spencer also maintains the website Jihad Watch. In any event, one does not have to read far to find verses like 4:99, in which God says that He will honor “those who fight, above those who stay at home,” or 9:3, also known as “the sword verse,” where the faithful learn that “when the sacred months are over, slay the idolaters wherever you find them.” Also see Helen Adolf, “Christendom and Islam in the Middle Ages: New Light on ‘Grail Stone’ and ‘Hidden Host,’” Speculum 32, no. 1 (January 1957): 103–15, esp. 107–8.
19 All ideas about using war to “command the good and forbid evil” come from Martin, “The Religious Foundations of War, Peace, and Statecraft in Islam,” 96–97, 106–7. One version of the phrase can be found in Qur’an, 3:104.
22 Admittedly, warriors did not receive license to indulge in unrestrained carnage. Their violence occurred within a holy, liminal moment where they alone risked death and destruction. The weak, or any other person or thing incapable of giving offense, should suffer no harm. In the Muwatta, verse 21:3.11 says that men at war must not “kill women and children, or an aged, infirm person.” Furthermore, the warriors learn that they cannot “cut down fruit-bearing trees” and “destroy an inhabited place.” Even the distribution of treasure and livestock seized from the enemy followed a certain protocol. Verse 21:6 counseled that only “free men who have been present at battle” could receive a share of booty. Still, the Muwatta praised the warrior’s efforts. In Verse 21:1, the Muwatta proclaims that “someone who does jihad” follows the way of God. Muhammad adds: “Allah laughs at two men. One of them kills the other, but each of them will enter the garden; one fights in the way of Allah and is killed, then Allah turns [in forgiveness] to the killer so he fights [in the way of Allah] and also becomes a martyr.” Verse 21:14.27 features Muhammad saying, “I would like to fight in the way of Allah and be killed, then brought to life again so I could be killed, and then brought to life again so I could be killed again.”
27 For more comment on this subject of holy men going to fight, see Bonner, “Some observations,” 7; Maribel Fierro, “Spiritual Alienation and Political Activism: The guraba in al-andalus during the Sixth/ Twelfth Century,” Aracica 47, no. 2 (2000): 230–60, esp. 233–34, 236.
29 Bonner, Jihad in Islamic History, 112.
31 Castro, The Structure of Spanish History, 204. The Diccionario de la Lengua Española, 2 vols. (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 1992) provides the etymology for each of the above words and illustrates their Arabic origins.


40 Qur’an 4:74: “Let those who fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoever fights in the way of Allah, and he is slain, or is victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward.”


43 Elena Lourie discusses, and dismisses, the possibility that the Knights Templar inspired the rise of Spain’s military societies. See “The Confraternity,” 159–70.

44 Matthew 5–7; Mark 12:17; John 18:36.


49 Qur’an 4:74: “Let those who fight in the way of Allah who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoever fights in the way of Allah, and he is slain, or is victorious, on him We shall bestow a vast reward.”


51 Zarqawi, Verse 21.15–34 emphasizes the rewards awaiting the warrior who sacrifices himself during wartime: “Being slain is but one way of meeting death, and the martyr is the one who gives himself, expectant of reward from Allah.”

52 Rubenstein, Armies of Heaven, 24.


56 Ibid., 165–66, 169.


62 Castro, The Structure of Spanish History, 205.


64 The quotation comes from a letter cited by Palou. Father Francisco García Figueroa and Father Manuel Camino to Father Francisco Palou, March 12, 1787; in Francisco Palou, Historical Account of the Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Juniper Serra, ed. George Wharton James, trans. C. Scott Williams (Pasadena: George Wharton James, 1913), xxix–xxxi.


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73 Father Martínez to Prefect Sarría, in Cook, Colonial Expeditions, 271; ibid., 272.


76 Palóu is referring to the pivotal battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212, in which Christians soundly defeated Muslims and all but made the reconquest inevitable. Francisco Palóu, Historical Account of the Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Father Junípero Serra, 79, 81.

77 Bancroft, The History of California, 2:489n16.


JOAQUIN MILLER AND THE SOCIAL CIRCLE AT THE HIGHTS, BY PHOEBE CUTLER, PP 40–61


1 Miller composed his popular poem “Columbus” in 1892, marking the 400th anniversary of the discovery of America; Joaquin Miller, Songs of the Soul (San Francisco: The Whittaker & Ray Company, 1896), 154–55.

2 http://www.joaquinmiller.com/1872intro.html. The symposium is scheduled for October, the exhibition for the spring; museum@mtshastamuseum.com, www.mtshastamuseum.com.


5 Miller’s children by the first two of his three producing alliances vie with each other for tragic endings. Of the two girls, according to Harr Wagner, Calla-Shasta
died of alcoholism at an early age; Maud was a failed, much-married actress. What ultimately happened to George and Harry is not recorded, but both boys—Harry more than George—served time in jail for larceny. Wagner, Joaquin Miller and His Other Self, 239.

Abbie’s preference for East Coast watering holes did not prevent her from enlarging her absent husband’s property by the purchase of 22 1/4 contiguous acres in 1891. Information regarding this speculative purchase did not find its way into the variant of the Miller legend promoted by his and Abbie’s only child, Juanita. Consequently, with the exception of William W. Winn, “Bohemian Club Memorial,” California Historical Society Quarterly 32, no. 3 (Sept. 1953), 237, Miller biographies have uniformly credited him with buying the entire 72.5 acres.

The first documented use of “Poet of the Sierras” appeared while Miller was still in London in the “Personal and Literary” feature of Missouri’s St. Joseph Herald on Feb. 2, 1872. That paper, in turn, was quoting the Portland [Oregon] Herald, May 1, 1904.


As close as they were, Ina Coolbrith would not have confided this lifelong secret to Miller. See Josephine DeWitt Rhodehamel and Raymund Francis Wood, Ina Coolbrith, Librarian and Laureate of California (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 20–21, 371–72.

Cincinnatus H. Miller, Joaquin, et al (Portland, OR: S. J. McCormick, 1869 [reissued in London, 1872]). Wagner, Joaquin Miller and His Other Self, 228. Joaquin Murrieta, a gold rush figure of uncertain origins, was sometimes called the “Mexican Robin Hood.” Wagner, following the demise of the Golden Era, became Miller’s business agent. His biography deals more with the Oakland years than the others and, although predictably partial, is considerably more reliable than Marberry’s Splendid Poesur.

The exact number of years, as the spelling of Cally’s name, varies in different accounts, but Charlotte Perkins Gilman notes her presence at Coolbrith’s twenty years on in
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At this time she was known as Charlotte Perkins Stetson, having recently been estranged from the artist Walter Stetson, whom she left behind in Pasadena.


Ibid., 554.

Anonymous (but in the style of Joaquin Miller), “Poet Got His Bath,” *San Francisco Call*, Sept. 1, 1895.


Wagner, *Joaquin Miller and His Other Self*, 124.

Martinez, *San Francisco Bay Area Writers and Artists*, 161.

Scofield, “The Poet of the Sierras.”

Martinez, *San Francisco Bay Area Writers and Artists*, 161.

Yonejiro Noguchi to Blanche Partington, Aug. 17, 1900, Partington Family Papers: Additions, 1885–1979, MSS 81/143, BANC. Jack London was informally affianced to Phyllis Partington. A singer, she performed with the Metropolitan Opera in New York.


Marberry, *Splendid Poseur*, 202, 252–53; Sterling, “Joaquin Miller,” 221. Marberry includes a scene in which a surprised George Sterling observes John Partington and Ambrose Bierce slaving over the construction of Moses’ pyramid. True to form, the very readable Marberry has been a little loose with the facts. Sterling saw “young Bierce,” Ambrose’s nephew, not the caustic journalist, who felt some fondness for his old acquaintance despite being well aware of his shortcomings. In his well-read * Examiner* column, the elder Bierce had famously declared that Miller was a liar . . . albeit a harmless, good-natured one. (Equally memorably, Joaquin responded, “I am not a liar. I simply exaggerate the truth.”). Ambrose Bierce, “Prattle,” *San Francisco Examiner*, Jan. 30, 1898.


Martinez, *San Francisco Bay Area Writers and Artists*, 180.


Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley City Directory: 1889–90 (San Francisco: F. M. Husted Publisher, Jan. 1890), 586.

Robert Boyle, Gertrude’s great-nephew, has determined that Takeshi Kanno’s passport was issued in Kyoto in October 1892; e-mail message to the author, Dec. 13, 2011.

Takeshi Kanno, *Creation-dawn: (a vision drama); evening talks and meditations* (Fruitvale, CA: Kanno, 1931). Noguchi included a couple of sample lines from one of his poems in a letter to Coolbrith: “The opiate vapors, in foamless waves, rock about this dreaming shore of April-Earth,” Noguchi to Coolbrith, Mar. 19, 1897, Ina Coolbrith Papers, Additions, BANC.


Alfred James Waterhouse Photographic Album, 2008.086, BANC; *Block Book of Oakland*, vol. 17 (Oakland, CA: Thomas Bros., 1924); Abigail Leland Miller Papers, MSS C-H 146, BANC. J. P. Irish praises Abbie for her success in recouping Waterhouse’s delinquent mortgage payment.


61 Henry Meade Bland to Ina Cook Peterson (niece of Coolbrith), Mar. 30, 1928, Ina D. Coolbrith Collection of Letters and Papers, BANC.

62 “Beautiful Ceremony Performed on the Hights Before Hundreds of Bard’s Admirers,” San Francisco Call, May 26, 1913.

63 Florence Hardiman Miller to Joaquin Miller, Aug. 5, 1896, Joaquin Miller Collection, HM 15691, Huntington Library. “Reception to a Rising Authoress,” San Francisco Call, Aug. 12, 1896. Mrs. Miller (no relation) also invited Coolbrith, Edwin Markham, Millicent Shinn, and Adeline Knapp. Of the five, the only ones to show up were Miller and Adeline Knapp, a journalist, antisuffragette, student of economics, and, briefly, an object of infatuation on the part of Charlotte Perkins Gilman.


67 Wagner, Joaquin Miller and His Other Self, 132.

SIDEBAR, THE IRRESPRESSIBLE JOHN P. IRISH . . . COLONEL, P. 47


1 J. P. Irish to Charles W. Irish, Aug. 10, 1885, Charles Wood Irish Papers, MS C362, box 2, University of Iowa, Iowa City.

SO FAR FROM HOME: RUSSIANS IN EARLY CALIFORNIA


Reviewed by Walter C. Uhler, former president of the Russian-American International Studies Association

Fort Ross was constructed some eighty miles north of San Francisco in 1812 by ninety-five Russians and forty Aleuts. Located on a shelf overlooking Bodega Bay, its mission was to serve as a trading post for the Russian American Company (RAC) in support of sea otter hunting off the coast of California and the supply of agricultural produce sorely needed by RAC employees in Alaska. To commemorate the 200th anniversary of the founding of Fort Ross, historical archaeologist Glenn J. Farris has assembled a fascinating collection of documents—some of them “translations of recent finds from Russian archives”—that shed light not only on the life and impact of Russians in California, but also on their interaction with Spaniards, Mexicans, Native Americans, and various foreign visitors.

Anxiety about Russian commercial activity in the North Pacific prompted the Spanish claimants to Alta California in 1768–69 to shift from exploration of the territory to actual settlement. But, notwithstanding this early anxiety, the first Russian didn’t appear until 1803. By 1808, however, the RAC was looking for a settlement in the territory north of the northernmost Spanish settlements, which it called New Albion. The documents suggest that Timofei Tarakanov offered the Bodega Miwoks “three blankets, three pairs of breeches, two axes, three hoes and some beads” in exchange for access to or ownership of territory that included the future site of Fort Ross, probably in 1811. Unlike the Spanish, the Russians demonstrated their willingness to acknowledge that the Indians had rights to the land.

The documents also suggest that the Russians and Aleuts treated the local Bodega Miwok and Kashaya Pomo Indians more humanely than did the Spaniards. Intermarriage was common, and Creoles eventually constituted the largest part of the colony’s population. For reasons still unknown, but which spark the imagination, the Indians called the Russians and Aleuts the “Undersea People.”

As a commercial enterprise, Fort Ross proved to be a bust. “By the early 1820s the Russians were reporting a steep decline in the number of sea otter furs taken each year.” Plan B, growing and supplying food to Alaskan colonies, never blossomed. Thus, by 1838, operational costs had risen to 72,000 rubles annually while revenues plunged to 8,000 rubles. Consequently, in 1841 the RAC found it expedient to sell Fort Ross and the surrounding fields to John Sutter for 30,000 piasters.

But, as these documents make clear, the Russian experience in and impact on California was far richer than such profit-and-loss calculations would suggest. They address the size and use of California redwoods, describe Spanish missions and Native American culture, enumerate the finds of Russian botanists, suggest a leading role by a Russian in the 1824 Chumash revolt, and detail the methods by which the use of script and mandatory purchases from the company store kept RAC employees perpetually in debt. They amply demonstrate why it is important to commemorate Fort Ross’s 200th anniversary.
HOBOES, BINDLESTIFFS, FRUIT TRAMPS, AND THE HARVESTING OF THE WEST

By Mark Wyman (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010, 368 pp., $28.00 cloth, $16.00 paper, $9.99 eBook)

HOBOS TO STREET PEOPLE: ARTISTS’ RESPONSES TO HOMELESSNESS FROM THE NEW DEAL TO THE PRESENT

By Art Hazelwood (San Francisco: Freedom Voices, 2011, 84 pp., $25.95 paper)

REVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER HERRING, PHD CANDIDATE OF SOCIOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, BERKELEY, AND ASSOCIATE RESEARCHER FOR THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

In their latest books, Mark Wyman and Art Hazelwood offer lucid portrayals of the most marginalized characters in the history of the American West and, in the wake of the Great Recession, provide valuable historical perspectives of the contemporary migrant worker and the homeless American.

The men, women, and children variously called bindlestiffs, fruit tramps, bums, and hoboes were vital to the creation of the West and its economy, yet their history has been largely untold. In his book Hoboes, Bindlestiffs, Fruit Tramps, and the Harvesting of the West, veteran historian Mark Wyman provides this much-needed story of western development. The book’s narrative follows the symbiotic evolution of rails, crops, and labor. With refrigerated freight and massive irrigation projects across the West, family fields of a few hundred acres were converted to “bonanza” farms composed of thousands, small farmers became small capitalists, and local hires were replaced by traveling flocks of seasonal labor. In the spirit of historian Howard Zinn, Wyman offers an alternative history of the West’s development from below, tracing the migrations and struggles of the floating proletariat that harvested America’s breadbasket, orchards, and forests from the Civil War to the 1920s.

Although Hoboes is singularly emblazoned on the book’s spine, the work focuses equally on migrating families

A bindlestiff walks from the mines to the lumber camps to the farms in Napa Valley in 1938.

Library of Congress; photograph by Dorothea Lange
of wives and small children, wage-working Indians, and high school students. In his chapter on the “Beeters,” Wyman explains how the early corporate domination of beets in Nebraska led to especially grueling labor conditions, where sugar entrepreneurs preferred families for their stability, less drunkenness, and, most crucially, more hands. The book depicts the use of convict labor, including several locked up on vagrancy charges, and the yearly migration to the Willamette of Native Americans, who picked hops for wages, moving between their traditional homes and capitalist society. The single itinerant hobo is but one of many characters in Wyman’s work.

Ethnic diversity also plays large in Wyman’s history. The book illustrates the striking differences between organized Japanese work gangs, doubly discriminated Mexican laborers, and German-Russian migrant families seeking the American dream through acquiring their own property. It also brings to light the ethnic alliances forged through harvest labor, such as the pan-Indianism formed through tribal migrations and the successful organizing by the International Workers of the World of a seemingly impossible ethnic assortment. Although this is a scholarly text, Wyman connects meticulously curated statistics, archival news reports, and policy memos with the personal experiences of the workers, rendering sympathetic portraits of his subjects and lively passages that move the work forward with verve.

Art Hazelwood’s Hoboes to Street People: Artists’ Responses to Homelessness from the New Deal to the Present picks up where Wyman leaves off, in the Great Depression, and presents powerful works of art aimed at social change. The beautiful publication is a product of the touring exhibition that first opened in San Francisco in 2009 and features nearly sixty works of visual art engaged with issues of homelessness. But this is no mere exhibition catalog. Hazelwood’s book traces the artworks through historical shifts in government policy, from the New Deal to Welfare Reform, and examines artists’ shifting relationship to their subjects and to the state, first as government WPA artists and photographers and later as activist artists relentlessly critical of the state. As Hazelwood himself is a member of the former camp, the book reads as a manifesto for artists to join together to inspire the public to act.

The book features works by well-known artists such as Dorothea Lange, Rockwell Kent, and Anton Refregier, but also resurrects older political artists who have largely been forgotten, including Leon Carlin and Giacomo Patri. Contemporary artists include a host of Californians, among them Jose Sances, Sandow Birk, and the formerly homeless Jane “in vain” Winkelman. The book brings together the works one usually finds on gallery walls and in an array of popular media aimed at the public conscience: screen-print posters, cover art of homeless broadsheets, and graphic novels. Although Wyman misses the opportunity to connect the history of the hoboes to migrants of today, dialogues between contemporary and past perceptions, portrayals, and policies of homelessness are at the center of Hazelwood’s survey. The book opens with two photographs: Dorothea Lange’s Mother and Two Children on the Road to Tule Lake, made in 1939, and David Bacon’s photograph of an indigenous woman and child, part of a group of farmworkers from Oaxaca, made nearly seven decades later. It is striking how little has changed when confronting the human pathos expressed in each portrait depicting mothers attempting to maintain their families amidst economic catastrophe. Yet, Hazelwood notes important distinctions: the globalizing forces that have reshaped agricultural economies since Lange’s era, the rollback of New Deal reforms, and the growing public perception that economic insecurity is considered a sign not of greed, but of a properly “flexible” workforce. In this new era of precarious labor and draconian anti-immigration policy, these two books offer historical perspectives that not only explain how we got here, but also provide the critical lenses necessary to imagine progressive futures.
NEW ENGLAND TO GOLD RUSH CALIFORNIA: THE JOURNAL OF ALFRED AND CHASTINA W. RIX 1849–1854

Edited with commentary by Lynn A. Bonfield (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011, 356 pp., $45.00 cloth)

REVIEWED BY GLORIA R. LOTHROP, EMERITUS PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTH RIDGE, AND COAUTHOR OF CALIFORNIA WOMEN: A HISTORY

In 1849, a pair of Vermont schoolteachers made a matrimonial pledge, promising that each would contribute to a diary. The result is a unique commentary on mid-century America, a nation energized by its pursuit of manifest destiny, invigorated by an emerging industrial age, stimulated by a religious awakening, and, above all, enriched by the Croesus of California gold.

Throughout the exercise, the two remained independent thinkers focused on the issues of the day. Along with daily events, the couple noted heated political discussions about issues such as the Fugitive Slave Act, the Maine Temperance Initiative, and the emerging Free Soilers’ agenda. Still, gold fever was their foremost subject, and it indelibly shaped the hopeful newlyweds’ future.

The events of Alfred and Chastina Rix’s marriage and venture to El Dorado from their Peacham, Vermont, home were penned in a blue-lined copybook that passed through generations, surviving both earthquake and fire before reaching the safety of the California Historical Society’s archives. Lynn Bonfield devoted more than three decades to research on the Rix journal. Exhaustive investigation is evident in the notes, appendix, and comprehensive bibliography containing several of Bonfield’s monographs and journal articles derived from her exhaustive examination of public records, newspapers, private archives, and family holdings.

The editor has preserved the original document from editorial intrusion, reserving her clarifications and amplifications for the annotations. As a result, readers may arrive at their personal conclusions concerning the denouement to this family drama. Bonfield resists temptation to be the omniscient editor, never drawing a connection between Alfred’s tinkering with such inventions as his armored watercraft, the Dumbfudgeon, and his later contributions to San Francisco’s urban development.

Bonfield’s thorough understanding of the diary is especially demonstrated by chapter introductions that prepare the reader for major events that often affect the spouses differently. For example, worn by the grinding demands of daily life—making candles and soap, harvesting, preserving, canning and brewing, churning, baking, cooking, spinning and knitting, sewing and maintaining the clothing, even ironing sixty-five shirts belonging to her family and her eight boarders—the usually benign Chastina observes ironically: “In the land of gold you must work or starve.”

Alfred, in clueless counterpoint to Chastina’s domestic and childcare workload, rains eloquent praise upon “the cult of true womanhood,” protecting women within home and hearth. The inherent fallacy of the observation is keenly apparent to Chastina following Alfred’s departure for California with a company of hopeful would-be miners. Once in the gold fields, he discovers that placer gold has played out, requiring more costly quartz mining techniques. Returning to San Francisco, employed as a teacher with a stable income, he plans for a family reunion and embarks on a respected law career, serves as justice of the peace, and finds future successes.

As always, the Arthur H. Clark Company has produced a bookman’s book consistent with its respected reputation. It is not only well crafted, but also accessible. The index includes separate entries for the more than three dozen period photos. The appendix provides genealogies as well as information on Alfred’s party of Argonauts. Finally, the bibliography is comprehensive, including not only the canon of California gold rush scholarship, but also recent studies in related fields.
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Make plans to attend the Organization of American Historians 2013 Annual Meeting

The Organization of American Historians will hold its 2013 Annual Meeting April 11-14 at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square. Join American history enthusiasts from around the world for four days filled with sessions, tours, and special events.

This year’s meeting will include more than 150 sessions on cutting-edge American history scholarship, teaching resources, and best practices. The program includes sessions on California history, tours of area attractions including the New Deal Mural Project at Coit Tower and Rincon Center, and the recently restored and renovated historic Angel Island Immigration Station in San Francisco Bay.

Also, don’t miss the OAH Exhibit Hall that includes the newest publications from the field’s most respected authors and publishers.

Register today to attend the 2013 OAH Annual Meeting in San Francisco and save! Early registration ends March 31. More information online at http://annualmeeting.oah.org
A window on the past, a portal to the future for over 140 years...

The California Historical Society is a membership based, non-profit organization with a mission to inspire and empower people to make California's richly diverse past a meaningful part of their contemporary lives.

Access to history, especially to one's own history, should not be a privilege. Join us in making California's remarkable history more accessible and relevant.

We welcome you to explore, at our research library or online, one of the most comprehensive collections revealing the environmental, economic, social, political, and cultural heritage of the entire state.

Your support enables us to care for and share these riches and fosier scholarship and learning.

The California Historical Society produces stunning exhibitions and offers a wide range of engaging educational programs for all ages in its San Francisco gallery and around our beautiful state.

Help us ensure that these programs continue. Join with us in keeping history alive for the future.

Anthea M. Hartig, Ph.D.
Executive Director
ON THE BACK COVER

The celebrated western writer Joaquin Miller (circa 1839–1913) was at the center of the Bay Area’s art and literary circles at the turn of the last century, principally at the Hights, his self-constructed East Bay hillside bohemia (see pages 40–61).

Miller’s participation in the creation of Adelaide Hanscom’s 1905 illustrated *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* is acknowledged in the book’s Arts and Crafts–inspired title page. Along with his fellow literati and friends George Sterling and George Wharton James, Miller posed for the pictorial photographer’s lavishly constructed scenes, which featured figures in ancient costume enacting parts of Khayyám’s verse.

Unfortunately, Hanscom’s negatives for the book, one of the first to illustrate a literary work with fine art photographs, were destroyed in San Francisco’s 1906 earthquake and fire.

_Courtesy of Michael Shreve; www.michaelshreve.com_
The aftermath of World War I dramatically altered the landscape of Los Angeles, and nowhere more visibly than in the canyons of Hollywood, where developers sought to imprint their vision on the fast-growing metropolis.

To help publicize a planned 500-acre subdivision, in 1923 the real estate syndicate headed by Los Angeles Times publisher Harry Chandler erected a large $21,000 sign composed of thirteen 50-foot letters spaced eight inches apart and illuminated by four thousand 20-watt light bulbs. The sign and the giant white dot below it, 35 feet in diameter, beckoned the eye as though punctuating the land’s intended use.

What was once the perfect advertisement is today the city’s signature landmark, minus the last four letters, which were removed as part of a 1949 restoration organized by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce. Appropriately, the Hollywood sign still harkens above the hills; Sherwin-Williams, following donations by Dutch Boy Paints in 1995 and Bay Cal Painting in 2005, has partnered with the Hollywood Sign Trust to prepare the sign in honor of its 90th birthday celebration in February 2013.

You don’t have to be in Los Angeles to join the party; live webcam views of the sign are available, together with history, lesson plans, and coverage of the sign in popular culture, at http://www.hollywoodsign.org/.
I See Beauty in This Life:
A Photographer Looks at 100 Years of Rural California

Over the past two years, writer and photographer Lisa M. Hamilton has been telling the stories of rural communities in her multimedia work Real Rural. For this exhibition she has delved into the collections of the California Historical Society to connect these present-day stories with the past. Featuring close to two hundred photographs, I See Beauty in This Life is a combination of large-scale color prints by Hamilton and her selections from California Historical Society’s vast photography collections—material dating from the 1880s through the mid-twentieth century.

This exhibition is part of Curating California, a new program through which remarkable Californians explore our rich collections with the goal of inspiring a project or exhibition.

Your State
Your History
Your Historical Society
This character signifies the struggle between the physical, mental and spiritual.

This color significant of the physical

of the mental

of the spiritual

The sign of Saturn or the seventh heaven

A bird can fly without wings

Expresses my gratitude to Joaquin Miller, George Sterling, George W. James and others who have rendered valuable assistance in posing for these illustrations and to Orlof Orlow for costumes and information on Persian symbolism.