



LEFT: Francisco, Dolores, and Alejo Patencio in front of their adobe home. OPPOSITE: Maria Antonia Andreas Pablo, mother of Will Pablo, was born in Andreas Canyon in Palm Springs in 1814.

A People's Journey



The story of the Cahuilla people spans thousands of years, from their ancestors' first village sites in the Southern California desert to the establishment of nine modern-day tribal governments, one of which is the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians.

BY MIRANDA CAUDELL

Archaeologists believe the story of the Agua Caliente Indians — a tale of trial, separation, reunion, constant adaptation, and even the supernatural — begins approximately 5,000 years ago, when the earliest Cahuilla ancestors arrived in the mountainous and desert terrain of Southern California from the north. But for the Cahuilla, creation begins much earlier.

In his landmark book *Mukat's People*, Lowell J. Bean, Ph.D., an esteemed anthropologist who has studied the Indians of Southern California for most of his life, discusses the Cahuilla belief in *?kiva?a*, the basic energy source from which all things, including the universe, were created. But that's only one part of the story. How did the earliest Cahuilla people get here? How did they evolve into today's Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians?



BEGINNINGS

There are several versions of the Cahuilla creation story. One version told by Tribal spiritual leader Alejo Patencio in the 1920s begins with Mukat and Temayawut, two brothers who emerged from a swirling mass of colors during the universe's first moments. After their birth, Mukat and Temayawut formed the earth, the oceans, all the creatures of the sea, and the sky.

From there, the brothers created the first people. Mukat used black mud and worked carefully, while Temayawut used white mud and hastily sculpted his figures, which — compared to Mukat's — were unrefined. After disagreeing with his brother over whose bodies were better, Temayawut took his creations and left.

It was then, according to Bean's 1989 book, *The Cahuilla* (written with Lisa Bourgeault), that Mukat's creatures came to life and the sun emerged. These people — the first Cahuilla — lived alongside early beings called *nukatem*. Because they had more *?kiva?a*, the *nukatem* were seen as powerful spirits who appeared in various forms: meteors, rainbows, whirlwinds, stars, and animals. In *Mukat's People*, Bean writes that the *nukatem* "connected the distant past with the present." In a way, these spiritual beings and their *?kiva?a* held the story of the Cahuilla people together, a beautiful story full of natural wonders and supernatural beings.

DESERT, PASS, AND MOUNTAIN

Although the first Cahuilla people shared a common ancestry and territory, they eventually evolved into distinct groups that occupied three different geographical zones: Mountain, Pass, and Desert.

The Desert Cahuilla inhabited the lower area of the Coachella Valley and areas near the Salton Sea. Despite the extreme heat and scarcity of rain, they were able to find plenty of resources here.

The Pass Cahuilla lived in the San Gorgonio Pass, a corridor that runs between the San Bernardino Mountains to the north and the San Jacinto Mountains to the south.

The San Jacinto Mountains were home to the Mountain Cahuilla. Here, Cahuilla hunters would find "deer, mountain sheep, rabbits, squirrels, and smaller animals" (*The Cahuilla*). Depending on the season, women would gather nuts, seeds, and berries.

Though they spoke slightly different dialects, the Desert, Pass, and Mountain Cahuilla still shared traditions and beliefs, and their lifestyles were very similar. Occasional attacks from neighboring groups were a reality, and the environment posed a constant threat, but overall, the Cahuilla lived in harmony with the land, each other, and other tribes.

THE ERA OF ASSIMILATION

The arrival of the Spanish in the late 18th century caused an unexpected plot twist in the story of the Cahuilla, who up until then were content in their ancestral homeland.



LEFT: Palm Springs Agua Caliente Band members in front of the Indian agent office and bathhouse in 1916. TOP ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Adrian Maxwell (Indian farm instructor), Amado Miguel, Alice Maxwell (wife of Adrian), Lee Arenas, Gabe Costa (or Baristo Sol Santiago), Clemente Segundo, John (or Juan) Segundo, Pedro Chino, Tom Segundo, Francisco Arenas, unknown, and Marcus Belardo. BOTTOM ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: Kermit Maxwell, Augusta Patencio, Ellen Maxwell, Mrs. Pedro (Marie) Chino, Anita Patencio Segundo, Emma Pete, Mrs. Lee (Guadalupe) Arenas, Della Arenas, and Mrs. Marcus (Rosalia) Belardo.



TOP: Pete Siva, Katherine Saubel, and Alan Siva.

ABOVE: A hand-tinted postcard, titled "Palm Springs Indians at Home, California," circa 1915.

The Spanish began establishing trade routes from Mexico and setting up missions along the Pacific Coast, and some Cahuilla welcomed the newcomers. In *The Cahuilla*, Bean describes how the native people traded with the Spanish for European merchandise. A small number even converted to Catholicism.

But exploitation of Cahuilla ancestral land became more problematic after the Mexican Revolution began in 1810. The Mexican government, having gained control over much of Southern California, began taking Cahuilla land and giving it to its own people for farming and ranching. Then in 1830, President Andrew Jackson signed the Indian Removal Act, which authorized the federal government to relocate tribes who lived within existing states or territories. Although this act primarily affected Indian tribes living east of the Mississippi (since California was not yet a state), it was the start of the American government's control of Indian affairs and the forced removal and relocation of Native Americans.

By the 1840s, the United States had more or less conquered Southern California, and waves of new settlers began flooding the area and taking over even more Indian lands, streams, and resources — including the land that Mukat had gifted to his people at the time of their creation.

It wasn't until the 1870s that the Indian Rights Association emerged in response to the rising conflict over land and rights between Native Americans and non-Indians. The organization proposed reserving parcels of land for native tribes — an idea that,

at first, seemed to protect the Cahuilla. So, from 1875 to 1877 the U.S. government, under executive order, established the first reservations for Cahuilla Indians, one of which was the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation, located in areas now known as Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage, Cathedral City, and unincorporated Riverside County.

The establishment of Indian reservations caused more changes for Native Americans than the arrival of the Spanish. Just 10 years after the first Cahuilla reservations were demarcated, the American government passed the General Allotment Act of 1887, also known as the Dawes Act. The law, which sought to dissolve tribal culture completely, allowed reservation land to be divided and given to individual tribal members who agreed to separate themselves from the tribe and were, in return, granted U.S. citizenship. Native American children were sent to government schools to learn English, and traditional Indian spiritual practices were banned as a result of these forced assimilation policies. What's more, the Cahuilla weren't allowed to govern their own people. It would take a nearly four-decade fight for the Cahuilla to gain even some semblance of protection over their culture and land.

A NEW DEAL

The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 could have provided another turning point in the Cahuilla story. Spearheaded by John Collier, a reformist, the act basically terminated the



FAR LEFT: Tribal Council Member Reid D. Milanovich with his family at the Palm Canyon memorial to his father, Richard M. Milanovich. LEFT: Tribal Council Member Anthony J. Andreas III and his wife, Robbie, at Dinner in the Canyons. BELOW: Attendees of Cahuilla Learning Day hold roasted agave.



General Allotment Act and repealed administration aimed at forced assimilation, if adopted by a tribe. In the Agua Caliente’s case, the traditionalists rejected the imposition of a foreign system of government, while the progressive faction wanted the benefits of federal allotments from the tribal land base.

Many Agua Caliente had started businesses on their tribally assigned land, and while the Tribal government offered to assign them more land to grow their businesses, some sought assignments from the federal government so they could own land separate from the Tribe. These progressives pressured the Tribe and the federal government for nontraditional elections so they could elect their own political leaders and finally start businesses on their separate land. In the decades that followed, Tribal Members gained more access to healthcare, education, and job opportunities despite continued shortcomings in income and land ownership. Federal legislation like the Indian Education Act (1972), the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1979), and the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (1988) that was passed in the second half of the 20th century also played a crucial role in the development and protection of tribal culture and business.

Today, there are nine federally recognized Cahuilla tribes, one of which is the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians, who in 1955, established their own Tribal Council to oversee all Tribal government affairs. Each of the nine tribes has its own reservation and tribal council. These Indian reservations are located in the same general territory where the Cahuilla have lived for thousands of years encompassing Imperial, Riverside, and San Diego counties.

The establishment of a federally recognized council was a major milestone in the Tribe’s fight for sovereignty after nearly a century of separation, discrimination, and government control. “Because of our sovereignty, we have the right to govern ourselves,” says Tribal Chairman Jeff L. Grubbe, of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. “Through the governing process, we have the ability to create a positive future for our Tribal members through seeking educational opportunities, managing Tribal land, focusing on environmental stewardship, and pursuing economic development opportunities.”

THE STORY LIVES ON

Today, many Cahuilla people maintain a balance between a modern American lifestyle and traditional Cahuilla beliefs and customs.

After Bean explains in *Mukat’s People* the good and bad possibilities that can arise from the power of *?kiva?ʼa*, he writes, “Mukat gave life and creative genius to the Cahuilla, but he also gave death, sickness, and frustration.” Since the beginning, hardship and struggle have been woven together with beauty and peace, and as always, today’s Cahuilla have emerged from years of hardship and must continue to reconcile early traditions with modern ways. With tribal sovereignty and governing bodies, they can now act as stewards of their future; as a result, they finally get to write their own story.

Perhaps the most important part about the Cahuilla story is that it hasn’t ended — it’s still being created and shared. Through the telling and retelling of their past, the Cahuilla have their own eternal story, one that can never be erased or forgotten. 🍌

Nine Bands, One People

The Cahuilla Indians are the native people who have long inhabited the Coachella Valley, the San Geronio Pass, and the San Jacinto Mountains. Today, the Cahuilla are divided into nine federally recognized bands, each with its own tribal government and reservation.



Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians of the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation
Palm Springs, California

Jeff L. Grubbe, Tribal Chairman
Larry N. Olinger, Tribal Vice Chairman
Vincent Gonzales III, Tribal Secretary/Treasurer
Anthony J. Andreas III, Tribal Council Member
Reid D. Milanovich, Tribal Council Member



Augustine Band of Cahuilla Indians
Coachella, California

Amanda Vance, Tribal Chairperson
William Vance, Tribal Vice Chairperson/
Treasurer
Ronnie Vance, Secretary



Cabazon Band of Mission Indians
Indio, California

Doug Welmas, Tribal Chairman
San Juanita Callaway, Vice Chairwoman
Helen Ruth Callaway, Secretary/Treasurer
Alexis R. Nichols, Liaison to the
General Council
Brenda Soulliere, Member at Large



Cahuilla Band of Mission Indians of the Cahuilla Reservation
Anza, California

Daniel Salgado, Tribal Chairman
Andrea Candelaria, Tribal Vice Chairwoman
Roberta Leash, Tribal Secretary
Adrian Salgado Sr., Tribal Council Member
Erica Calloway, Tribal Council Member



Los Coyotes Band of Cahuilla and Cupeno Indians of the Los Coyotes Reservation
Warner Springs, San Diego County

Shane Chapparosa, Tribal Chairman
Ray Chapparosa, Vice Chairman
Edward Norte, Executive Council Member
Lynn Chapparosa, Executive Council Member
Janet Dillman, Executive Council Member
Milton Campbell, Executive Council Member
Andrew Campbell, Executive Council Member



Morongo Band of Cahuilla Mission Indians of the Morongo Reservation
Banning, California, at the foot of the San Jacinto and San Bernardino mountains

Robert Martin, Tribal Chairman
Mary Ann Andreas, Tribal Vice Chairperson
Damon Sandoval, Council Member
James Siva, Council Member
Brian Lugo, Council Member
Anne Robinson, Council Member
Charles Martin, Council Member



Ramona Band of Cahuilla
Anza, California

Joseph Hamilton, Tribal Chairman
Manuel Hamilton, Tribal Vice Chairman
Jessica Hamilton, Tribal Council Member
Nick Hamilton, Tribal Council Member
Gerald J. Dworschak, Tribal Council Member
Skyylr F. Hamilton, Tribal Council Member



Santa Rosa Band of Cahuilla Indians
Riverside County, between Palm Springs and Anza

Steven Estrada, Tribal Chairman
John Marcus, Vice Chairman
Alexis Rubalcava-Alto, Secretary
Lovina Saul, Treasurer
Gabriella Rubalcava, Council Member
Mayme Modesto, Council Member
Jeanian Espinoza, Council Member



Torres-Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians
Thermal, California

Mary L. Resvaloso, Tribal Chairperson
Desiree Franco, Vice Chairperson
Alesia Reed, Secretary
Thomas Tortez, Treasurer
Frank Durgin Jr., Council Member
Joseph Mirelez, Council Member
Elesha Duro, Council Member Proxy

(Current lists of elected leaders as of August 2016)