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White settlements contributed to scattering of Indian people

By Roberta Lyons

The early Indians of Cloverdale made up a relatively small group of people who were living in villages along the Russian River. They were part of what is generally regarded as the Southern group of Pomo Indians living in Sonoma County in small tribes. Pomo was the largest of any of the California nations and was divided into four major regions, including

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Northern, Central, Eastern, and Southern. Many of them had distinct language dialects. The term Pomo,

was usually attached to the name of the village, such as Makahmo-Pomo, or Sedam-Pomo, and is believed to mean "town," or the "people of the town."

Cloverdale Indians were part of the "Musalakon" group, the main settlement was called Makahmo and it was located at the mouth of Sulpher Creek, where six villages existed on both sides of the Russian River, according to information available at the Cloverdale Historical Society museum. According to Makahmo descendent, Vickey Macias, Indian villages were scattered all along the Russian River, from Cloverdale down to Asti. Hunting camps were also prevalent during pre-European settlement of the area.

After the gold rush and California Statehood,

the influx of European (white) settlers into California began to greatly impact the native population in the State, which at one time numbered almost 300,000 people. Independent militias attacked the small tribes, often killing large groups of Indians. Then, tribes were forced to move to designated "reservations," which is where many of the Pomo tribes in Lake County, for example, still live today.

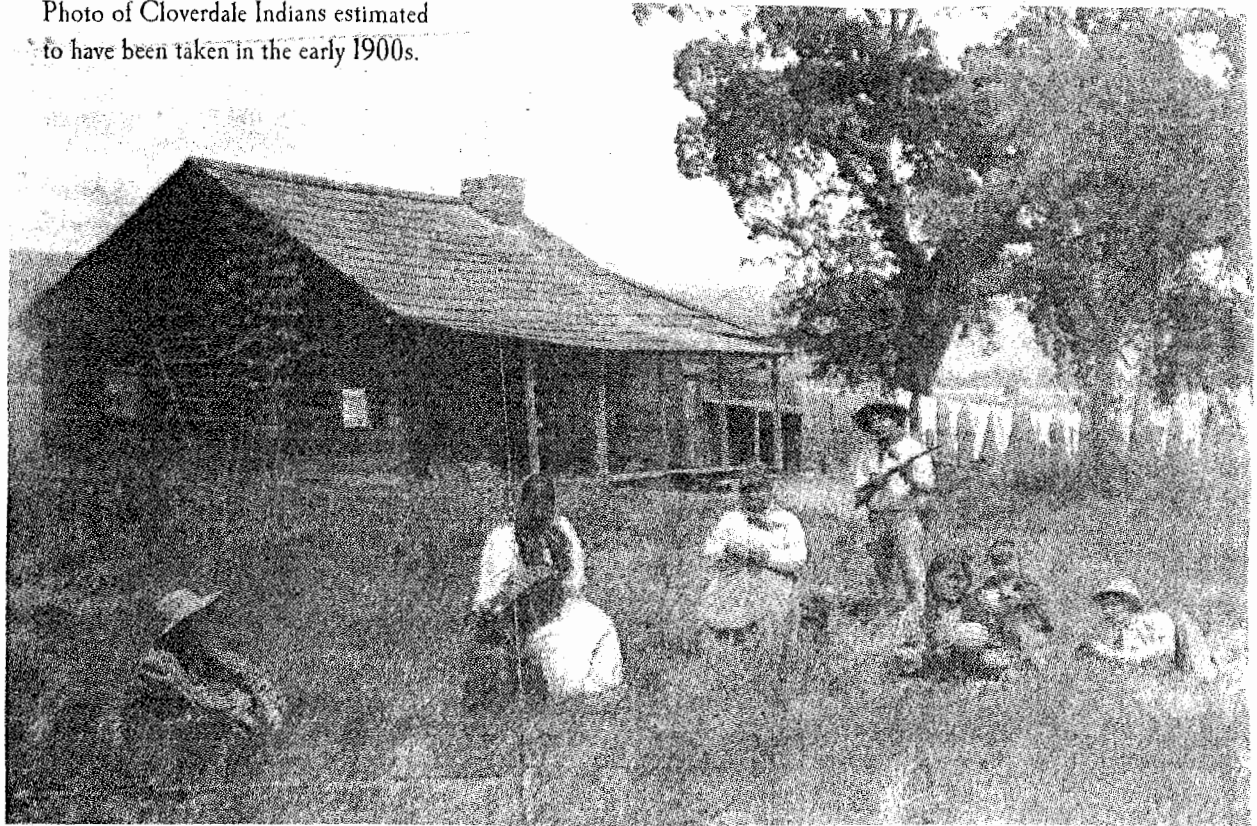
According to Macias, when settlers first came to Cloverdale in the mid-19th century, the Indians just moved away from them. "The Europeans just took the land, and we kept on moving," she said. "We weren't considered civilized, so people didn't want us around. We were forced to leave." The Indians either camped along the Russian River, or moved to settlers' ranches where they worked as ranch hands and housekeepers. Most of the photographs of Indians on file at the Cloverdale Museum, show Indians along the River, or refer to them as being at different ranches.

Finally, in the 1920s, some of the local Indians, who had heard that the Bureau of Indian Affairs was buying land for Indians, wrote to the BIA asking for land here. According to documentation that Macias has, the government did purchase a little over 30 acres and allotted that acreage to 12 Pomo families here.

This original reservation was located on Asti Lane, just south of Cloverdale; it was purchased from a Mr. and Mrs. Daniels who offered their land for purchase by the Indians. A remaining parcel of this land, about 13 acres, is still owned by the Santana family of Cloverdale.

According to Macias, of the 12 Indian families,

Photo of Cloverdale Indians estimated to have been taken in the early 1900s.



Some built homes, and tried to survive on their land in Cloverdale. However, many had to move away in order to make a living. Many "followed the crops," she reported. That is how it went, according to Macias, until only five families were left on the land. Then, in 1958, the Federal government "terminated" the Indian reservations throughout the State. This act, Macias believes, was a way for the Federal government to wash its hands of the Indians. It basically gave the Indians the reservation land they were living on. Unfortunately, most Indians then lost the land either by not paying their property taxes, to scam artists, or in other ways.

Of the Cloverdale Indians who were "terminated," in 1961, only the Santana family presently maintains the title to their land. This is partly because Caltrans needed much of the reservation and for a re-routing (by-pass) of Highway 101, and purchased property for this purpose from several of the Indians still on the reservation in the early 1960s.

During the period from 1920 to the early 1960s, most of Cloverdale's Indians had already left.

Vickey Macias grew up in Santa Rosa and Windsor, but she says she and her family always knew they were Cloverdale Indians. "A lot of people moved to other areas in Sonoma County, or Mendocino County. They found work on ranches to provide for their families. Some moved to different rancherias or reservations. Most people just couldn't survive here. My great-grandmother couldn't survive. She left in the 1930s and moved to Healdsburg with her son. People followed the crops or joined the military. Even though we lived in Santa Rosa, we knew we came from Cloverdale," Macias avers. "We weren't a Federally recognized tribe. But, we didn't think anyone needed to give us a piece of paper. We knew who we were."

Then, she explains that things started changing for the Indians, and in order to get funding for education and other benefits, tribes had to be Federally recognized.

That is when the tribe was "restored," in 1983 through the famous Tillie Hardwick Act. Tillie Hardwick was an Indian woman from Pinoleville. She went to the BIA to get funding for her boys to go to school, and found out she was not eligible for benefits. The Act "restored" 17 tribes in California that were considered to have been illegally terminated and Cloverdale was one of those tribes. John Santana was the tribe's spokesman at the time.

Cloverdale Rancheria, however, even after being legally restored. Next came a long period of confusion and upheaval within the tribe. In 1992, Jeff Wilson came to Cloverdale and established himself as chairman of the tribe. After he was removed, he took the BIA to court. Finally, the lineal descendants of the 12 original reservation families voted in their council with Patricia Hermasillo elected as chair in 1998.

"Eventually, we got a full membership. All have come from the 12 families originally on the reservation from 1922. We have 490 people, including children, and this number has been growing. Our Elders are passing on, but we are getting more children too," Macias said.

In response to the current criticism about the tribe attempting to establish a gaming facility here, Macias points out that she and other tribal leaders are simply trying to better the circumstances of their people. "We have never made our intentions a secret," she

says. "We have had a lot of hard obstacles come our way, but our people have always had a desire to move on. All of the conflicts in the past have clouded the main issue, which is the people. It is our lives and our future. We know who we are and who we were. We want to move forward and be able to say 'this is ours.' We are trying to do what we think is right for ourselves and our people," she stressed.

She believes a casino will help tribal members with health care, housing, and education. She said her tribe would not exclude members. "Sometimes other tribes have tried to exclude people. We are not trying to throw people out. We want everyone to have a link and keep people as a whole," she concluded.