

FACT SHEET:

Kuruvungna Village Springs History and the Gabrielino | Tongva Springs Foundation

Gabrielino | Tongva

The Tongva, a prosperous, sophisticated Uto-Aztec speaking people were the original inhabitants of Los Angeles and the Channel Islands. Kuruvungna, which translates as “place where we are in the sun”, was a significant village on what is now the campus of University High School in West Los Angeles. Recent archeological evidence suggests that the area surrounding the natural springs have been occupied for over 8,000 years.

Spain

On August 4, 1769, Gaspar de Portola and his expedition camped at Kuruvungna as Spain began to colonize the frontier of ‘Alta California’. Father Crespi noted the friendly and welcoming inhabitants of Kuruvungna, but the civilizing project of Spain led to the forcible relocation of the Tongva and other natives to the Mission San Gabriel, where they became known as the ‘Gabrielino Indians’.

Mexico

In 1821, the Republic of Mexico gained independence from Spain, and California Mission lands, which were promised to the Native Peoples, were given to well-positioned men of power. In 1828, a grazing permit was granted to Don Francisco Sepulveda, and in 1839, he became owner of Rancho San Vicente y Santa Monica, which included Kuruvungna and the Springs.

United States

In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe was signed after United States invaded and conquered half of Mexico, and California became part of the United States of America.

In 1872 the Sepulveda family sold 38,409 acres for \$54,000 to Colonel Robert S. Baker; the Rancho land was subdivided and sold, including the village site of Kuruvungna. Later sold to the Santa Monica Land and Water Company, the Springs, named for the tears of Saint Monica, supplied both water and the name of the new city. The area surrounding the Springs was subdivided and became the municipality of Sawtelle before annexation by the City of Los Angeles in 1922.

University High School

In 1900, 24 acres, the equivalent of six city blocks, was purchased by Los Angeles Board of Education. During construction of the new high school, it was noted that an *“Indian Village had existed there. The site was said to have yielded paints, grinding stones, bone tools and several other artifacts.”*

In 1924, the new Harding High School opened and the name was later changed to University High School to associate with UCLA. In 1931, the 2-acre area surrounding the ‘lower springs’ was fenced and two concrete lined ponds were constructed. During the 1950’s, exotic plants were installed, many which still exist on site. Classrooms, parking lots, tennis courts, a lath house, a greenhouse and rabbit hutches were also built on the site.

In 1976, the first archeological testing was conducted upon discovery of human remains during more construction on the school campus, and in 1980 and again in 1989, archeologists noted that remnants of the village were still strewn throughout the area. In 2013-14, ancestral remains and artifacts were again unearthed and ceremoniously re-interred on the north hill of Kuruvungna. Artifacts, including stone tools and other archeologically significant finds, are stored in the cultural center on the site.

Gabrielino | Tongva Springs Foundation

By 1992 the 2-acre site had become abandoned and neglected. Descendants of the Gabrielino | Tongva, alumni of University High School and local volunteers began a campaign to preserve and protect the springs and began the cleanup and restoration of the site.

Alliances created with State Senator Tom Hayden and other community activists led to the formation of the Gabrielino | Tongva Springs Foundation (GTSF), a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to protecting, preserving and restoring the Sacred Springs and surrounding area. The foundation now maintains the site under a lease agreement with University High School and LAUSD.

In 1998, the efforts of the foundation resulted in Senate Bill 1956, sponsored by Senator Tom Hayden and signed by Governor Pete Wilson, which provided \$250,000 for the preservation of the Springs. A Task Force of professional consultants, including Hydrologists, Planners, Architects as well as Native Americans and LAUSD staff was formed to create a framework for restoring and preserving the sanctity of the historic Gabrielino | Tongva village site.

The Task Force recommendations included the removal of invasive plants and replacement with native plants, use of spring water for irrigation, the creation of a Tongva village and gardens for education and cultural preservation, and the establishment of a museum and visitor center.

Recent Activities

In 2021, a restoration phase was implemented with volunteer and in-kind contributions from community members and local businesses.

Abandoned structures, debris, dead trees and brush, invasive plants have been removed and hundreds of local native species are being planted throughout the site. The ponds were cleaned and restored; invasive crawfish were eradicated allowing for the introduction of threatened native creatures.

Gardens, orchards and landscapes have been established using a solar powered system for irrigation with spring water. The village of Kuruvungna is being revitalized with the communal construction of a traditional thatched kiiy.

The foundation is maintaining the existing cultural center in a re-purposed former classroom to exhibit artifacts, maps, photographs, and displays of the remarkable history of the site.

About the Gabrielino | Tongva Springs Foundation

The foundation is an all-volunteer 501(3)(3) non-profit public benefit corporation, which leases the property from the Los Angeles Unified School District with a mission to protect, preserve and restore the Kuruvungna Springs and help educate the public about the original people of Los Angeles.

The foundation has formal and informal relationships with UCLA, L.A. County Museum of Natural History, the San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, the Boy Scouts of America, Ballona Wetlands, and the Theodore Payne Foundation, among others.

Quick facts:

- GTSF believes the natural springs, native gardens, and history of Kuruvungna offer a unique outdoor educational experience to share with the community.
- GTSF are the caretakers of the 2-acre site and maintain the grounds and the waters of the springs.
- GTSF is not a Native American tribal organization.

- GTSF receives funding from grants and donations, and works with students, academics, Native American groups, pro-bono professionals, enthusiastic volunteers, Boy Scouts of America, and other community organizations.
- GTSF hosts public and private tours and events for students and community groups, and is open to the public the First Saturday of each month from 10-3.

Kuruvungna Recognition

- 1954 Designated California Registered Landmark Site No. 522
- 1954 Named Historical Point of Interest by the “Sons of the American Colonists”
- 1969 Assigned the Archeological Designation CA-LAN-382 by the South Central Coast Information Center.
- 1989 Registered with the Native American Heritage Commission as a Sacred Site.

Various names of the Kuruvungna Springs over the years

- San Gregorio 1769
- El Berrendo
- Wounded Deer Springs
- San Rogerio
- Las Lagrimas de Santa Monica 1827
- San Vicente Springs 1838
- Junipero Serra Springs
- Walter L. Armacost Botanical Conservatory 1947
- Susan M. Dorsey Memorial Gardens 1947
- Tongva Sacred Springs