



Richard's Tales of Ocean Park, Santa Monica and other magic places.

NEWSLETTER

April 2023 | Issue No. 68 | laxlon@aol.com

The Magical Tongva Springs on Barrington

Thank you... To the Santa Monica Conservancy for permission to use their text in this month's newsletter.



Before the Europeans

The story of Santa Monica begins centuries before the arrival of Spanish explorers, Mexican ranchos and America's Westward migration, back when the indigenous Tongva people inhabited our coastal plain.

While human remains from 8,000 years ago have been discovered at Ballona Creek, perhaps the most observable evidence of the local Tongva population can be found at the Kuruvungna Sacred Springs, a California Historical Landmark on the grounds of University High School.

The tribe lived in some 31 known villages throughout the Los Angeles Basin and on the Catalina and San Clemente

islands, with as many as 500 huts in each settlement. The villages were identified by family lineage, with many contemporary place names such as Topanga, Temescal, Cahuenga, Tujunga and Santa Monica's Moomat Ahiko Way derived from the Tongva, which means "people of the earth." Tongva Park, opposite the Santa Monica Pier, celebrates and honors Santa Monica's earliest inhabitants.

Tongva Springs

Now in the shadow of West Los Angeles development, the Kuruvungna Springs once supported the thriving Tongva village of Kuruvungna, meaning "a place where we are in the sun." The springs were used as a source of fresh water by the Tongva since at least the 5th century B.C., producing up to 25,000 gallons daily. Much later, they even supplied water to a budding Santa Monica.

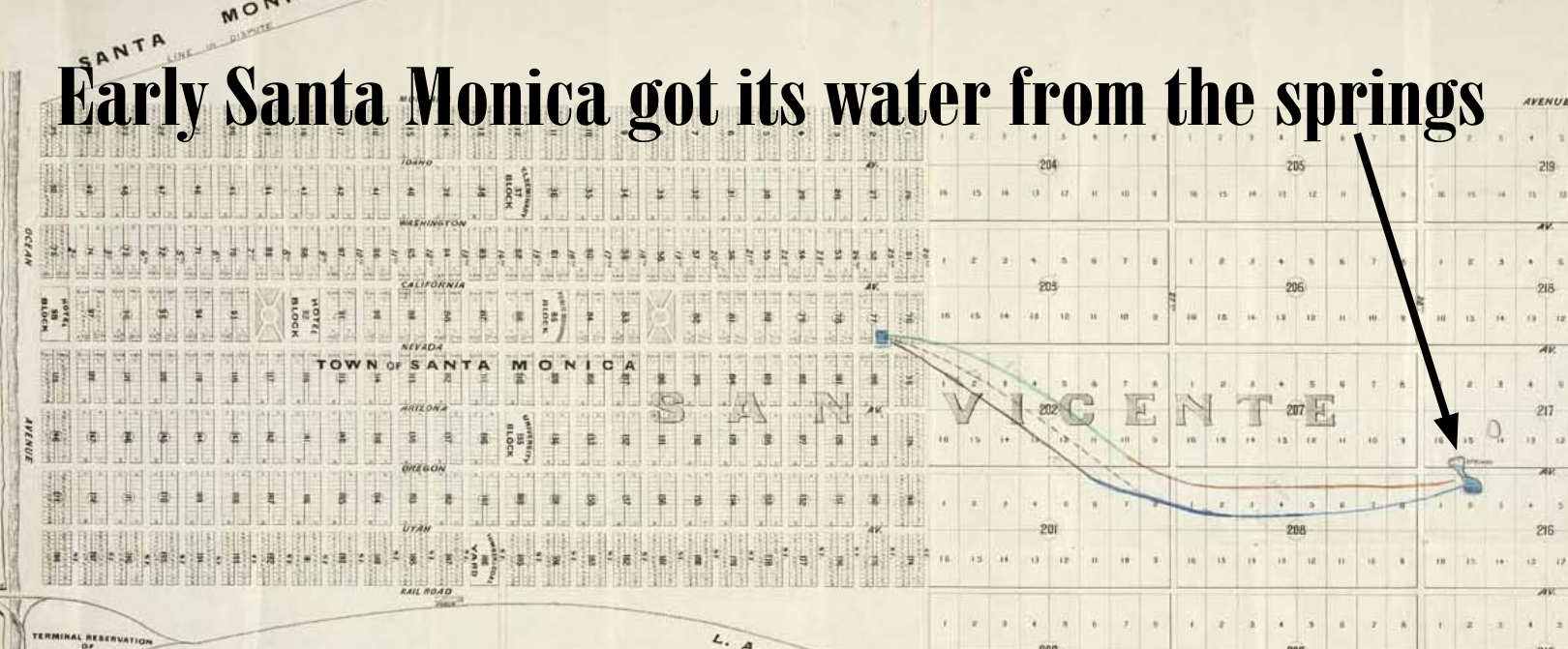
Open April 1st, 10am to 3pm

Open one day a month on the first Saturday of the month.

Top: They have found 31 distinct Tongva villages in the Los Angeles basin, the one above was at the mouth of Ballona Creek but much like the one at the springs on Barrington. Notice the kiïy structure they built for shelter. Right: the Tongva Springs in West L.A. as they look today, generating about 56,000 gallons of water daily.



Early Santa Monica got its water from the springs



Above: The 1875 map shows the springs and pipes of two different diameters that delivered water to a reservoir at 24th and Wilshire, now Douglas Park

Portola “discovers” Los Angeles

Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portola's party became aware of the Tongva settlement in 1769 while they were still at sea, spotting the smoke from their campfires, rising into the sky. A landing party followed the smoke which led them to the Tongva settlement at the springs. They described the settlement as a “good village” and reported they were warmly greeted with gifts of sage, watercress, chia and fresh water.

The Spanish explorers ultimately thanked the peaceful tribe by killing its leaders, dissolving their villages, conscripting its citizenry to build missions and re-branding their tribal name to Gabriolino.

The springs are tied to the naming of Santa Monica, according to accounts of the Portola expedition. Father Juan Crespi's diary remarks that the flowing water

reminded him of Saint Monica's tears for her then wayward son Augustine before his conversion, as that day was Saint Monica's name day. When Santa Monica's founders later heard this story, they were inspired to name their new city after the saint.

The Tongva numbered about 5,000 by the time the Spanish settlers arrived in the 18th century. By the mid-19th century, with the Mission San Gabriel fully established, well over 25,000 Tongva baptisms had been conducted, which led to the disappearance of the tribe's pre-Christian religious beliefs and mythology. The Tongva, forced to assimilate to Spanish and Mexican culture, were rechristened Gabrieliños because of their close association with the Mission San Gabriel. This “new” moniker is not universally accepted by all of today's Tongva people.

The Tongva language was on the brink

of extinction by 1900, leaving only fragmentary records of the native tongue and culture. But fortunately, the Tongva were storytellers. Passed down through the generations, the tales taught lessons, customs and beliefs, and how to understand the natural world.

For Tongva elder Julia Bogany, those stories have not only been guides to her own identity, but also as primers in teaching the next generation. She took great comfort in her granddaughter, who has shown an interest in their culture and looks as if she'll be bringing the culture to new generations. “Stories of six of my ancestor women are powerful to me and have empowered my life,” said Bogany, an educator and cultural affairs officer for the Gabrieliño/Tongva band of mission Indians.

The springs land is preserved

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.

Left: In 2010 construction near the springs revealed the foundation of an early building, partially under an athletic field. Angie Behrns on the right, supervises some volunteers but ultimately there was no money to research the find and it was just covered back up for examination at some later date.

Behrns said. “At one point, they uncovered what looked to be the foundation of a Rancho San Vicente homestead owned by the Sepulveda family. It was right there on the path leading to the football field, but they cemented over it. The kids have no idea what they are walking over every day.”





Above: Tongva artifacts, typical of those uncovered near the site of the sacred springs.

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, a reaction to the scandals in the Harding Administration and 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. But by the 1980s, the springs’ corner of the campus had fallen into disrepair.

Save the Springs

The turnaround came in 1991, when Tongva descendant Angie Behrens and her husband returned to University High for a class reunion and were shocked by what they encountered. Years of disuse and neglect had destroyed the site that Tongvas considered sacred.

Behrens enlisted family and friends to help with trash and graffiti removal, but the work of restoring the springs proved

more than her family and fellow Native Americans could carry out alone. To secure grants Behrens formed the Gabrieliño Tongva Springs Foundation, which continues to preserve the site and educate the public about its history and culture.

“We thought if we formed a non-profit maybe we could get grants to enhance the area, beautify it a little more,” Behrens said. “We lobbied Sacramento and with the help of Sen. Tom Hayden, we got some funding, and that really cleaned the place up.”

The bill, signed by Gov. Pete Wilson in 1998, appropriated \$50,000 to the California Department of Parks and Recreation to be spent on a local assistance

grant “to plan for the preservation of the Gabrieliño/Tongva Springs and property adjacent thereto . . . in order to enhance environmental, cultural and educational opportunities.”

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 Gabrieliño-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



Julia Bogany, a cultural officer for the Gabrieliño Tongva Band of Mission Indians until her death in 2011, said that the structure of the kiiy is traditionally made of willow reeds while its covering is made of tule reeds. Meanwhile, a kiiy at the coast would use whale ribs as its structure instead of willow reeds, she added.

Above, a replica of a traditional Tongva kiiy at the springs in West L.A. It sold last week for \$725,000. Location, location, location! Just kidding.

The kiiy only serves as a place to sleep, Bogany said. Unlike today, when people often spend long stretches of time inside their homes, the Tongva did all of their activities outside, she said.

Bogany, who also was an elder-in-residence at Pitzer College, served as the cultural affairs officer for the Gabrieliño Tongva Band of Mission Indians for more than 20 years. In addition to her work as an educator, lecturer and activist, Bogany was also the author of her website “To Be Visible,” on which she wrote about Tongva culture and history. She was also the president of the Gabrieliño Tongva Springs Foundation before Ramirez.



Left, *The springs are a tranquil oasis in West L.A.*

efforts and dedication, the springs still bubble today, creating pools and small streams amid the lush foliage of the sacred grounds. But even today the continued flow of the springs is always threatened every time there is new construction uphill along Wilshire Blvd. Deep foundations can mean changes to the sub-strata water table. And because of concerns about underground pollution, the springs are no longer used as a water supply, channeled instead into the municipal drainage system and out to sea.

Annual Celebration

Each year on Indigenous Peoples’ Day in mid-October, the foundation sponsors a festival at the site that draws hundreds and includes music, dancing, storytelling, foods and crafts in a fitting tribute to a once vibrant Native community... and the very beginnings of Santa Monica.

museum and visitor center.

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.

Thanks to the descendants’ heroic

Below, How to find the Tongva Springs: *The entrance to the parking lot is on the west side of Barrington between Texas Ave. and Ohio Ave.*



Visit Tongva Springs

**Open first Saturday, every month
10am-3pm
1439 S. Barrington Ave., West LA
University High School Campus**

How to Visit the Springs

The Kuruvungna Village Springs are preserved and protected by the Gabri-elino-Tongva Springs Foundation who welcomes visitors to the site on the first Saturday of each month from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.