

# EXCAVATION OF A YOKUTS INDIAN CEMETERY

ELK HILLS, KERN COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

BY

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With a Report on the Historical Specimens

BY

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## INTRODUCTION

To think as a Yokuts Indian would think was the problem presented to Frank W. Stockman of Taft one spring day as he sat on the deserted site of a Yokuts village which long ago had existed on the northwest shore of Buena Vista Lake in San Joaquin Valley near the edge of Elk Hills, California. The problem was: What spot would the Yokuts have selected for their cemetery?

Frank was sixteen years of age at the time, and, thanks to a wise father, had acquired outdoor interests, archaeology among them. He was out with his father, E. S. Stockman, and their boon companion, W. H. Ireland, on this scientific quest—the locating of the cemetery of this Yokuts settlement.

Undoubtedly here had been a village of considerable importance. It apparently extended about 4000 feet along a sandspit at the outlet of Buena Vista Lake, usually dry, but formerly a sheet of shallow water ten miles or more across. One end of the sandspit formed a land-locked harbor, the other joined the hills, and here at the slightly higher elevation had evidently been the village during periods of high water. Great quantities of freshwater clam shells, ashes, shell beads, flakes of chalcedony, and broken stone artifacts indicated long occupancy.

This was a land of bulrushes, generally called tules. To the Yokuts, tules had clearly been a very important feature of their existence—tules for fuel, for canoes and rafts, for floor mats and house coverings, for bags and other containers, for baby cradles and duck decoys, and tule roots for food.

Food had been abundant, the lake supplying countless clams, fish, and waterfowl, the hills rabbits, grasshoppers, and tule elk. It was evident that life had been simple for these lucky Yokuts; but, when it finally ended, where were they buried with those possessions that would reveal something of the story of their little-known culture? <sup>1</sup>

1. Kroeber, A. L., *Handbook of Indians of California*, Bul. 78, Bur. Amer. Ethnol., p. 543, Washington, 1925.

angular arrowpoints of black obsidian.

Soapstone was extensively used, two quarries formerly worked by the Indians being located in the hills bordering the valley, fine soapstone near Lindsay to the northeast and coarse soapstone in the Tehachapi Mountains to the south. There were soapstone beads of the usual valley type, and bowls and vessels of varying kinds and sizes, some evidently from Santa Catalina Island, most of them broken. Of sandstone there were pestles, large bowls, and beautifully made small bowls of fine-grained stone, possibly used in the important Jimson weed ceremony, also broken.

Of granitic stone there were pestles and skilfully-made polished "charm stones" used by the medicine-men. None of these was broken. There were a few amethystine beads.

In various burials were found the stones that presumably had been heated and used to boil water in water-tight baskets, arrow-shaft-straighteners, stone knives and scrapers, and well-rounded small stone footballs (smaller than our tennis balls), such as were used in the famous California contests of village against village.

### HISTORIC BURIALS

All burials without any white man's material at least suggest that they may be of pre-Spanish origin; but at present it is impossible to date them. Not so, however, with the burials which contain white man's material, of which there was a strange assortment, much of which can be dated. After white contact, it seems to have been the custom of Indians to bury with their dead the white man's glass beads, his metal, and other wonderful things.

### TRADE BEADS

Of glass trade beads more than twenty-five different kinds were found, many thousands in total, of red, blue, purple, green yellow, and other colors, large beads, small beads, and beads so tiny that it is difficult to string them. These have now been identified by Arthur Woodward, making quite an array of dates, from 1542 to 1860, and perhaps the most comprehensive collection of trade beads from one California site thus far excavated. Tradition has it that the village was abandoned in 1833 when a terrible pestilence nearly exterminated the Indian population of the San Joaquin Valley. The beads indicate that the cemetery was used in a very limited way for some twenty years later. It has been

surmised that this was without the knowledge of the owners of the property. Possibly the burials were made at night.

### OBJECTS OF CHINA

There were small fragments of old china, among which, now restored, are a saucer and two pitchers of considerable beauty which have been identified by an expert on English china, Mrs. Robert Alexander of Glendale. The saucer is of Worcester ware made prior to 1800 and the pitchers are of English copper luster ware made from about 1815 to 1835, among the most valuable china to come into California. How this china reached the site is a subject for intriguing speculation.

### OBJECTS OF METAL

With some of the burials were brass buttons of several kinds, some that turned out to be the famous "Phoenix" buttons of Emperor Henri Christophe of Haiti; thimbles made into bells; tiny metal crosses; metal spoons; knives; small containers; scissors; and various other items derived from white people.

### DISTURBED BURIALS

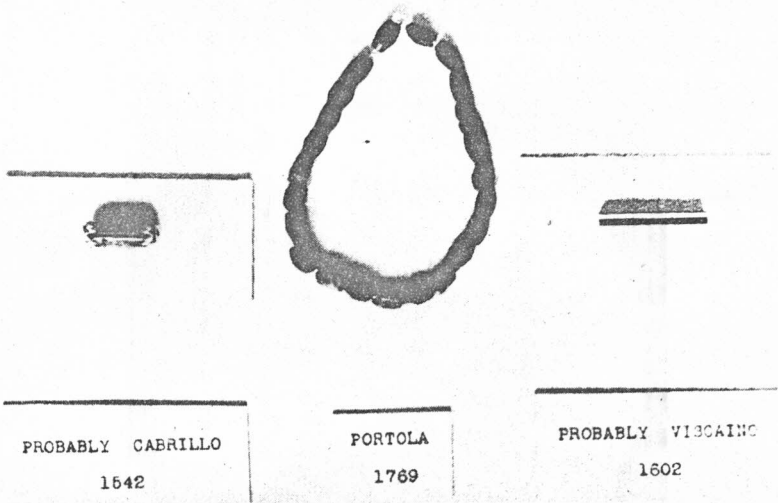
The burials in the western part of the cemetery had been completely disturbed by the recent looters and by unknown persons at an earlier time, believed to have been Indians when making burials now also almost obliterated. All the remaining bones were in small fragments, thousands of them, among which much material was recovered by screening.

In Square D-60 and Square D-70 the material was entirely native: arrowpoints of several types; beads of shell, soapstone, and amethyst; bowls of soapstone and sandstone; crystals of quartz; dice of California walnut shells; fabric; gaming sticks; knives of chalcedony; mica; pestles of stone; pigment; and scrapers of chalcedony.

In Square E-50, Square E-60, and neighboring squares there was this native material: arrowpoints; asphaltum in tiny stone bowl; beads of amethyst, shell and soapstone; bowls of sandstone and soapstone; dice of California walnut shells; fabric; gaming sticks; tiny pottery olla, probably Shoshonean; and shinny ball of wood; and of white man's historic material: champagne bottle fragment (French); decanter fragment (American); china pitchers and saucer; tiny metal crosses; knife blade of iron; lan-

TABLE 2  
DETAILS OF HISTORIC BURIALS

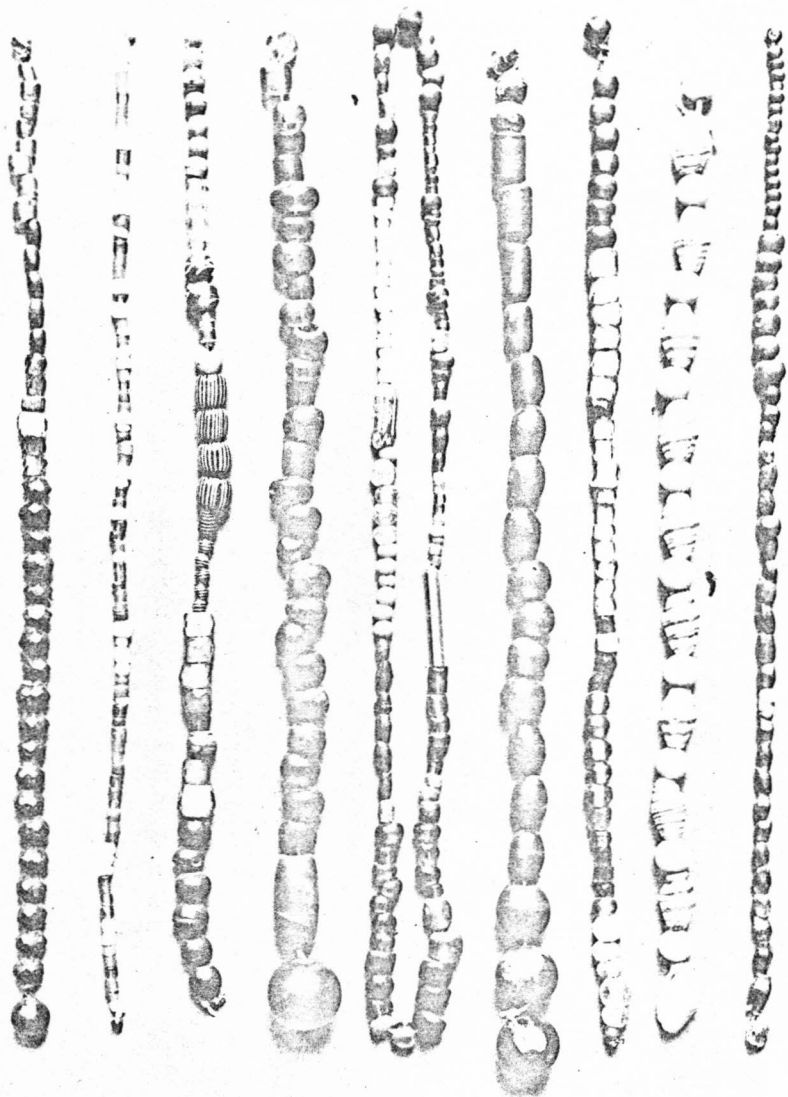
Burial	Depth	Age	Head	Facing	Tule	Fabric	Arrow	Trade Beads	Miscel. Material
F-70-A	49"	Adult	N	S		x		Late 18	Shell and stone beads
F-50-A	24"	Adult						1800-21	Stone beads, Phoenix buttons
F-50-D	31"	Adult	N	W			1	Early 19	Stone bowl
F-50-F	59"	Adult						1800-21	
F-50-G	51"	Adult					2	Early 19	Stone beads, bowl and scrapers
F-50-H	57"	Adult	N					18th-19th	
F-50-L	55"	Adult	W				2	18th-19th	Shell ornaments, stone bowl, dice
F-50-P	38"	Adult	N		x			18th-19th	
F-60-A	30"	Adult	N						Leather
F-60-B	32"	Child	E					Early 19	
F-60-C	32"	Adult	N					1850-60	
F-60-F	40"	Adult	N	E	x			18th-19th	White pigment
F-60-G	42"	Adult	N	W			1	1800-21	Lantern glass, red pigment
F-60-K	48"	Adult	W	E					Iron knife, bull roarer
F-60-L	48"	Adult						18th-19th	
F-60-M	61"	Youth	N				1	1850-60	Brass button
F-60-O	30"	Adult	E	W	x		1	1820-60	Scissors, scored steatite
F-60-P	40"	Adult	W	S				Early 19	Stone bowl
F-60-Q	41"	Youth	E	S	x	x		1850-60	Brass buttons, stone bowl intact
F-60-R	44"	Child	S	W	x			Early 19	Basket
F-60-S	36"	Child	N					18th-19th	Stone bead
F-60-T-1	42"	Adult	E					Early 19	
F-60-T-2	50"	Adult						Early 19	
F-60-T-3	50"	Adult	E					Early 19	Stone bowl
F-60-T-4	50"	Adult						Early 19	
F-60-T-5	50"	Adult						Early 19	
F-60-T-6	55"	Adult						Early 19	
F-60-U	42"	Youth	N					Late 18	Shell and stone beads
F-60-W	45"	Child	N					18th-19th	Large basket
F-60-X	48"	Adult	N	S			1	Late 18	Soaproot brush
F-60-ZA	53"	Child	N				1	1806	Metal cross
F-60-ZB	56"	Child						1850-60	Buttons, scissors, thimble
F-60-ZG	42"	Adult	S	E			1	Early 19	Wooden & stone bowls, stone knife, arrow straightener
F-60-ZH	50"	Adult	N		x	x	1	Late 18	Water bottle, stone beads
F-70-A	28"	Child	N		x			Early 19	Baskets, wooden and stone bowls, shell beads
F-70-D-1	31"	Infant	N		x			1800-60	Baskets, iron pot, wooden bowl, pestle
F-70-D-2	31"	Child	N		x			1800-60	Basket, pig whistle, shell beads
F-70-F	38"	Child	E		x			1850-60	Wooden bowl, large basket
F-70-G	40"	Youth	N					Early 19	
G-50-A	45"	Adult	N	E	x		8	Late 18	Shell ornaments
G-50-B	57"	Infant	N		x			1830-60	Baskets, buttons, horn cup, water bottle, shell beads
G-50-C	57"	Infant	N			x		18th-19th	Shell ornaments, basket, pigment
G-60-A	39"	Adult	N					Early 19th	Shell beads
G-60-C	26"	Infant	W		x			18th-19th	Shell beads
G-60-J	38"	Youth	N			x		Late 18	Wooden bowl, shell beads
G-60-K	43"	Infant			x			Early 19	Basket, shell ornaments



- a. Early Venetian trade beads. "Star" or "Chevron," "Barleycorn," and "Pipe" or "Bugle." Disturbed burials E-50.

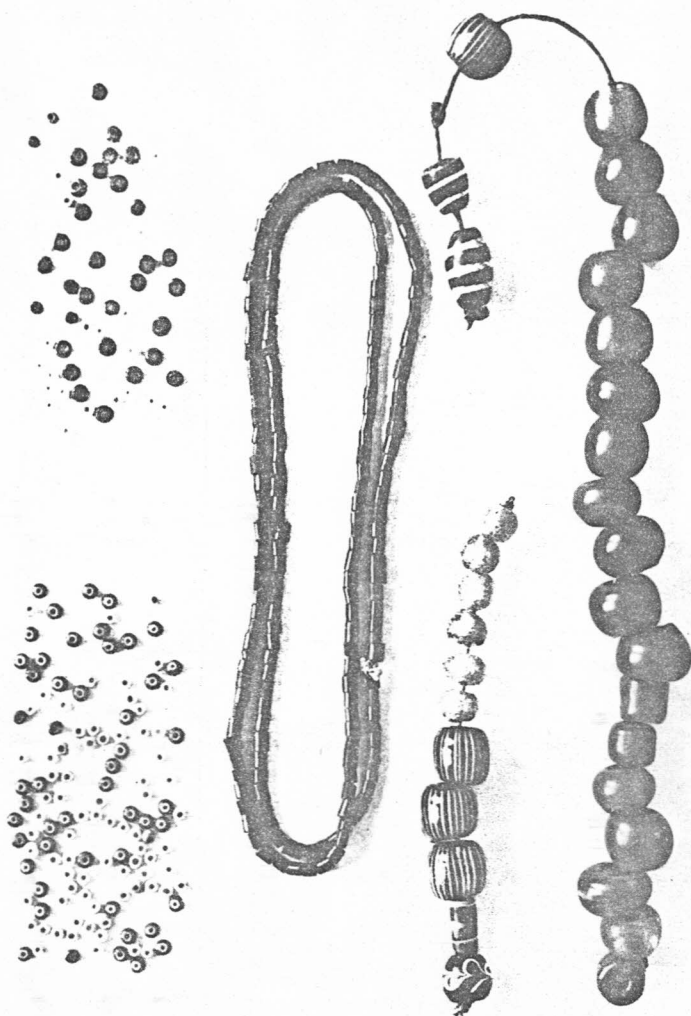


- b. China saucer (restored). Worcester ware made in England before 1800  
Diameter 5½ inches. Disturbed burial E-50.



### SOME OF THE VARIETIES OF BEADS

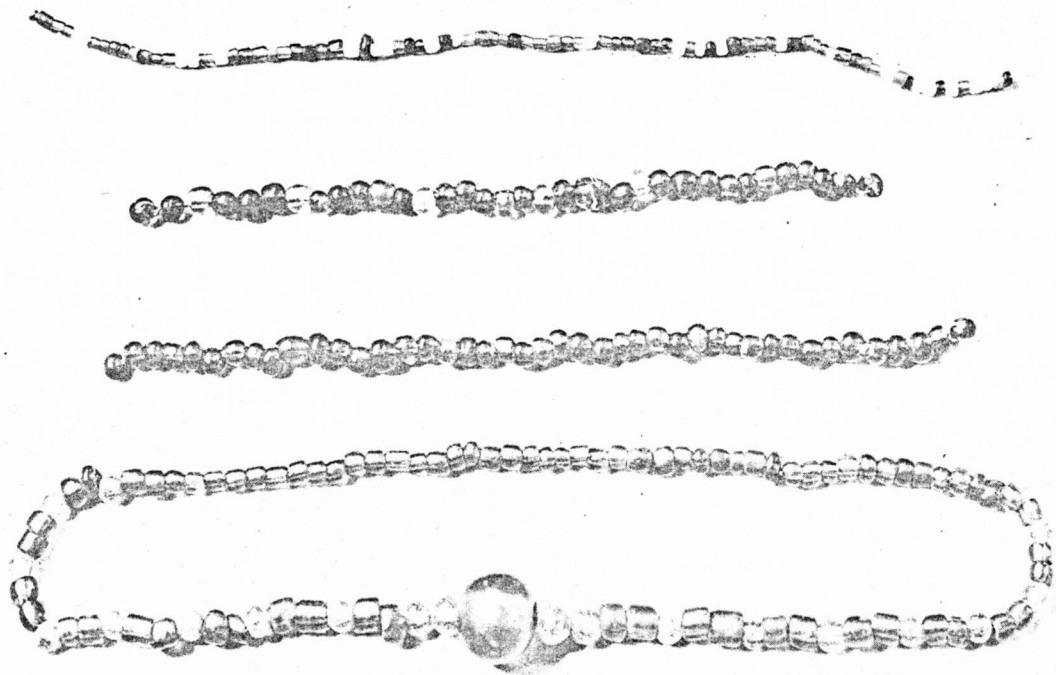
All are trade beads except two native amethystine beads, lower end of fourth strand from left. Mostly disturbed burials E-50, E-60.



TRADE BEADS, LATE 18th CENTURY AND EARLY 19th  
CENTURY

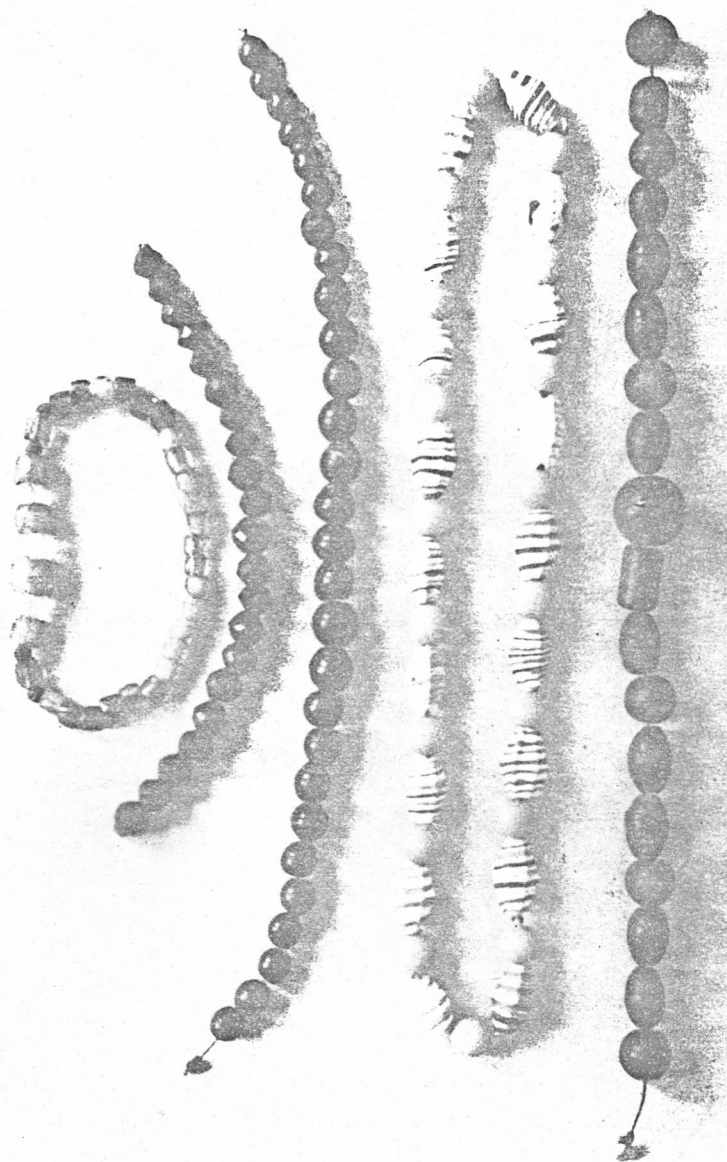
From burials F-60-G, G-50-C, F-70-D.





TRADE BEADS, MOSTLY EARLY 19th CENTURY

From burials E-50, G-60-A, F-50-L, F-50-D.



TRADE BEADS, ABOUT 1850-1860

From burials F-70-D, F-60-M, F-60-C, F-60-O.

## REPORT ON THE HISTORICAL SPECIMENS

By Arthur Woodward

According to Kroeber the Tulamni, a division of the southern Yokuts, occupied the territory around the northern end of Buena Vista Lake.

The first overland exploring expedition which passed along the coast in 1769 did not penetrate the valley. The Anza expedition of 1775-1776, while entering the San Joaquin Valley from the north on its return trip, turned back to the coast before reaching the lake. No doubt there were parties who penetrated the region of the lake between this period and 1806, but since these were usually soldiers in search of runaway neophytes from the Missions, it is not likely that there was any general distribution of trade goods among the inhabitants of the lake rancherias.

On July 19, 1806, an expedition under the command of Captain Francisco Ruiz set out from Santa Barbara Mission to explore the "Tierra adentro." The diarist of this expedition was Padre Jose Maria de Zalvidea. They were at Buena Vista rancheria on July 25, approaching the village from the south, and on the evening of the 26th were at the "rancheria de la punta de La Laguna llamada Sisupitau" (the rancheria of the point of the lake called Sisupiatu).

In September, 1806, Don Gabriel Moraga set out from the Presidio of San Francisco and entered the San Joaquin valley by way of San Juan Bautista. However, I do not believe this party passed near Buena Vista Lake. This party came down the east side of the valley and passed east of the lake.

In the fall of 1815, another party set out from Santa Barbara and penetrated the Tulare region where they met another party who had come in through Estrella Pass from San Miguel under command of Captain Juan Ortega. From this trip the Santa Barbara party brought back a number of neophytes.

In October, 1819, forty men under Captain Jose Maria Estudilla went in by way of San Miguel, explored around the lakes, and returned to Monterey after a trip of several weeks.

In 1824 a party led by Portilla crossed into the valley and met

a second party at San Emigdio which had come by way of San Miguel.<sup>1</sup>

Thus it would seem that aside from the casual yearly or semi-yearly contacts of the valley people with the coastal tribes, when beads might be obtained in trade, most of the beads might well date between 1806 and 1824. Of course a few of the beads might have been obtained by friendly contact prior to the actual entradas during the years mentioned. The Phoenix buttons may have gone over from the coast to the valley between 1815 and 1825. The later material, along with the buttons of the 1850-1860 period, may have been distributed by McKee, Wozencraft, and Barbour, Indian commissioners, in their noted non-ratified treaties of 1851, or by the gold traders of that decade.

The large brass buttons were plain coat buttons of a common civilian type worn both in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Such knickknacks were a part of the staple trade objects of West Coast traders. In 1833 British traders bartered a dozen brass buttons for one beaver-skin.<sup>2</sup>

The other late items—thimbles, scissors, small round brass buttons, and the clay whistles—seem to date from the same general period, 1830-1850. The little clay pig whistle is Mexican, possibly from Coyotepec.

Glass beads constituted the greater part of the European material recovered from the graves and, as such, will be considered separately.

In order to keep the record straight, I have adhered to the identification system by which the beads are tagged.

Lot E-50, from disturbed burials—These two long beads are the oldest in the lot. The short, red, white, blue and yellow bead is a variation of the type known as the "star" or "chevron" pattern, and specimens of this type have been found on 16th and 17th century sites from Florida to Pennsylvania, and on one or two occasions in old graves on the Santa Barbara channel. The same type of long striped beads of various colors, known as "pipe" beads, or "bugle" beads, occurs with the "chevron" beads in 17th century

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1. These parties are mentioned in "Archivo de la Mision de Santa Barbara, Expediciones y Caminatas 1806-1821," Vol. IV, pp. 2-47 and 49-68. Also in "The King's Old Soldiers in California, Their Expeditions in the Interior," Evening Bulletin, May 28, 1864, and "Talk of Old Times in California" (idem, June 2, 5 and 6, 1865) and "Archaeology of the Southern San Joaquin Valley, California," by E. W. Gifford and W. E. Schenck, University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology, Vol. 23, No. 1, 1926, p. 26.

2. Bancroft, H. H., *History of the Northwest Coast*, Vol. I, p. 458.

graves in Pennsylvania. The paucity of this type in the Elk Hills site, combined with the fact that they were found in a disturbed area, seems to indicate that the Indians who later buried their dead in this place dug through the earlier burials and in replacing the earth, these beads (which had been probably obtained from the coast in trade) were thrown back and re-covered, probably with early 19th century burials.

Lot F-50-A—These beads and brass buttons, found with an adult, belong to the period 1800-1821. However, with the buttons in question, I suspect they found their way into the interior about the year 1825, the beads earlier than the buttons. These buttons bear the insignia and motto of King Henri Christophe, black emperor of Haiti, 1811-1820, and are of the 5th, 7th, and possibly 6th regiments. I believe them to be sleeve or collar buttons of uniform coats which, according to information I had from Mr. Howland Wood of the American Numismatic Society, had been ordered from New England merchants by Christophe for his regiments prior to the rebellion of his subjects which resulted in his death. The motto or legend on the button is "JE RENAISS DE MES CENDRES" (I WILL ARISE FROM MY ASHES), which comports nicely with the crowned Phoenix bird in the center of the button. These buttons, large and small, were distributed along the western coast of America by American traders during the early 1820's and 1830's. I have seen them in collections inland as far as Tumacacori mission in southern Arizona, and they are also present in the mission collections at San Juan Capistrano, San Luis Rey, Santa Barbara and Santa Ynez. I believe they were also found in archaeological excavations at The Dalles in Oregon, where they were reported by Strong and Schenck.

Lot F-50-F—Similar to F-50-A and F-50-P.

Lot F-50-L—This strand contains 18th century beads. Some I believe to date from about 1750, which would appear to place them in point of time with the first overland expeditions, 1769-1776. The two blue and one white or crystal-clear faceted beads are those of the 17th and 18th century type. The large round blue bead is characteristic of the late 18th century and early 19th, about 1800-1830. Similarly the round red bead with white serpentine inlay is of the same period. Comparative beads: 18th, early 19th centuries, round red bead with serpentine markings, older burials Mescalitlan Id. Sta. Barbara; large blue bead, Santa

Ynez mission compound, after 1804; faceted bead, late 18th cent. site Alabama c. 1789 and La Purissima Mission.

Lot F-50-P—Adult. Late 18th to early 19th century. These beads may date from some of the early 19th century entradas made by Spanish exploring parties, 1806-1821. The peculiar blue of these beads seems to characterize those which accompanied the red barleycorn type. Comparative beads: Pt. Magu cf. F-60-X also burials c. 1789, Elmore Co., Ala.

Lot F-60-C, obtained in the grave of an elderly female, consisting of round, opaque turquoise blue beads and hexagonal red and white striped beads, from all indications were distributed about 1850-1860. Although the red and white beads are of a rather unusual type, the blue beads are relatively common in burials of this period in the upper San Joaquin Valley in the vicinity of Sacramento and other nearby regions. The red and white beads are mold-pressed. Comparative specimens: Mustang Mound near Sacramento and burials in Amador County.

Lot F-60-G—Similar to F-50-A and F-50-P.

Lot F-60-M—Middle 19th century, 1850-1860. Blue faceted beads common to graves of this period in upper San Joaquin and in later period graves in southern California along the coast common at old MAAVI cemetery, Tejon Reserve, where last burials occurred 1875-1876.

Lot F-60-O—From the grave of an adult. These varied from large spherical red beads to small green and blue beads of the type occurring in large numbers in graves of the San Joaquin Valley tribes, obtained from white miners and gold traders, 1850-1860. Comparative beads: Mustang Mound, Amador County burials; Red Bluff burials; lava bed specimens, Modoc county; and from the peninsula, Humboldt Bay, California. This strand, while predominantly of 1850-1860 period, contains beads of the earlier 19th century, indicating perhaps in the case of this burial that the adult had obtained beads of the older type when a youngster and had added to the strand of beads of later type. The spanning of the years is natural and the sequence of types logical.

Lot F-60-R—Similar to lot G-60-A, and G-50-C.

Lot F-60-S—Probably of the same period as F-50-P.

Lot F-60-X—Elderly female. These beads are probably late 18th century or possibly of the first decade of the 19th century. The characteristic bead of this string is the small indented red

bead of the "barleycorn" type which appears to date from middle to late 18th century sites in various parts of the country, and in California at least has survived until the first two decades of the 19th century. Accompanying these red beads are other small blue and green beads which are also identifiable with 18th century sites. Comparative beads for this strand are: Pueblo burials, Gobernador Canon, New Mexico, c. 1750; Nebraska (old Pawnee site) c. 1792; Pt. Magu burials, c. 1792-1812; Christie Site, Santa Cruz Island, n.d., but apparently contemporaneous with late 18th century.

Lot F-60-ZA—Same as G-50-C. Small silver cross of late 18th and early 19th century, indicates active contact with missionaries, early exploring parties who carried gifts in 1776-1806 (two parties that year), 1810, etc. I think the 1806 party from Santa Barbara may have been responsible for this gift. No late beads in this lot. Comparative beads: Point Magu; Conejo Ranch, Simi Valley; Pawnee site, Nebraska; New Mexico sites, 18th century.

Lot F-70-D—With the exception of a few beads on this strand, they appear to be of the 1850-1860 period. Comments on this lot are similar to those for part of F-50-L.

Lot G-50-B—With the exception of the nine plain greenish blue and red beads tied together at the end of this strand, the beads are of the 1850-1860 period. The small group of specimens enumerated are of the 1800-1830 period. Since this necklace was with an infant, I would suspect that the burial dated from about 1854-1860, and the faceted beads were part of the child's own necklace, the smaller beads having been contributed by some doting aunt or mother. Comparative beads: 1850-1860, Mustang Mound, dated by cap-and-ball pistol, and coins. Late 18th to early 19th century red beads, dating in this case say from 1806-1821, have been found in Alabama sites, Nebraska sites, and southern California sites, all approximating the same period, 1792-1813.

G-50-C—Child burial. These beads date from late 18th century, or possibly 1806-1810. From their number I should judge they were all of that period and were a direct gift to the child by the relatives, the child having been buried at that time; in other words, the beads were not heirlooms, but contemporary with the child, thus placing the burial in this instance probably within the first decade of the 19th century. All of the glass beads on the strand indicate the late 18th and first two decades of the 19th cen-

turies. Comparative beads from Magu, Santa Barbara, Nebraska, New Mexico (Gobernador and Pecos sites), and other southern California sites of this period.

Lot G-60-A—This simple strand of small beads seems to be of the 1806-1821 period, although their identification is difficult. However, taking into consideration the color, size, and form of these beads, I am inclined to think that they belong to the earlier decades of the 19th century. Comparative beads of this type have come from coastal sites near Santa Barbara; inland sites, Conejo Ranch about 1812-13, and among the burials of the same period at Elk Hills.