

ETHNOHISTORIC SOUTH GATE?

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A pervasive belief perpetuated by local histories in South Gate in southeast Los Angeles County is that the city was founded on the sites of the Gabrielino villages Ahau and Tibahangna. Ethnographers have also suggested Houtgna existed in South Gate. This study traces the Tibahangna and Ahau claims to a single source, evaluates all three place names, and finds none of these places were within the confines of the City of South Gate. However, evidence is revealed that at least one of the claims is based on an accidental archaeological discovery that, until now, was not documented in the archaeological literature.

South Gate is a Massachusetts-shaped city in southeastern Los Angeles County. Just north of Interstate 105 and bisected by Interstate 710, it is bordered on the north by the unincorporated community of Walnut Park and the cities of Bell Gardens, Cudahy, and Huntington Park, on the west by the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and unincorporated Willowbrook, on the south by the cities of Lynwood and Paramount, and on the east by the City of Downey. The modern bed of the Los Angeles River cuts through the city, which is located on the river's flat alluvial floodplain. The city is located within the center of traditional territory of the Gabrielino (Johnston 1962; Kroeber 1925; McCawley 1996).

The City of South Gate originated as the community of Southgate Gardens, which was developed as a white working-class suburb of Los Angeles beginning on September 3, 1917. The community originally consisted of 17 blocks bounded by Santa Ana Street (formerly Old Ranch Road) to the north, Independence Avenue to the south, Long Beach Boulevard to the west, and Garden View to the east (Bicentennial Heritage Committee 1976:8). Southgate Gardens quickly grew and joined with neighboring housing tracts such as Home Gardens and Magnolia Park to incorporate as a city on January 20, 1923 (Laslett 2012; Nicolaidis 2002). It soon annexed Hollydale, formerly a part of Rancho Los Cerritos. By the 1940s, the city occupied an area near its current boundaries (Figure 1), covering approximately seven square miles (Stamps 1965:237). Still a working-class community, today South Gate is occupied predominantly by Hispanics and largely by immigrants (Quinones 2007). South Gate is where I happened to settle in 2012 when I first came to the Los Angeles area to work for AECOM, so it has particular significance for me.

The Southgate Gardens property, and all of the neighboring subdivisions that were annexed to South Gate (except those east of the Los Angeles River), were once part of Rancho San Antonio. Rancho San Antonio was granted to Antonio Maria Lugo in three phases. The first rancho, which included today's Lynwood and South Gate, was granted in 1810. An additional tract of land in what is today Bell was added to Rancho San Antonio in 1823. Still more land was added to the northeast in 1827 (Whitehead 1976). According to Lugo's kinsman, H. D. Barrows, "It was one of the finest cattle ranges in the Territory; there was abundance of water on it, and on both sides of it, as the Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers were not then taken out for irrigation, and there were lines of live willows extending along their banks to near the sea" (Barrows 1896:28). Nineteenth century maps of the Rancho San Antonio show an old bed of the Los Angeles River cutting through the rancho, labeled the "Arroyo del Pueblo," which persisted in United States Geological Service (USGS) topographic maps nearly until the turn of the twentieth century (Figures 2 and 3).

It is a persistent local belief in South Gate that two Native American communities were located within the boundaries of what is today the City of South Gate. The Los Angeles County Library states on its website (County of Los Angeles Public Library n.d.) that "Two villages, probably known as Tibahag-Na and Ahau, are thought to have been located within the boundaries of the present community." According to the Bicentennial Heritage Committee (1976:2), "Fr. Crispi [*sic*], in January, 1770, on his return from the Monterey area, passed again through the South Gate area, with Engineer Miguel Constanzo, noting Indian sites which have been referred to as 'Tibahagna' and Ahau."

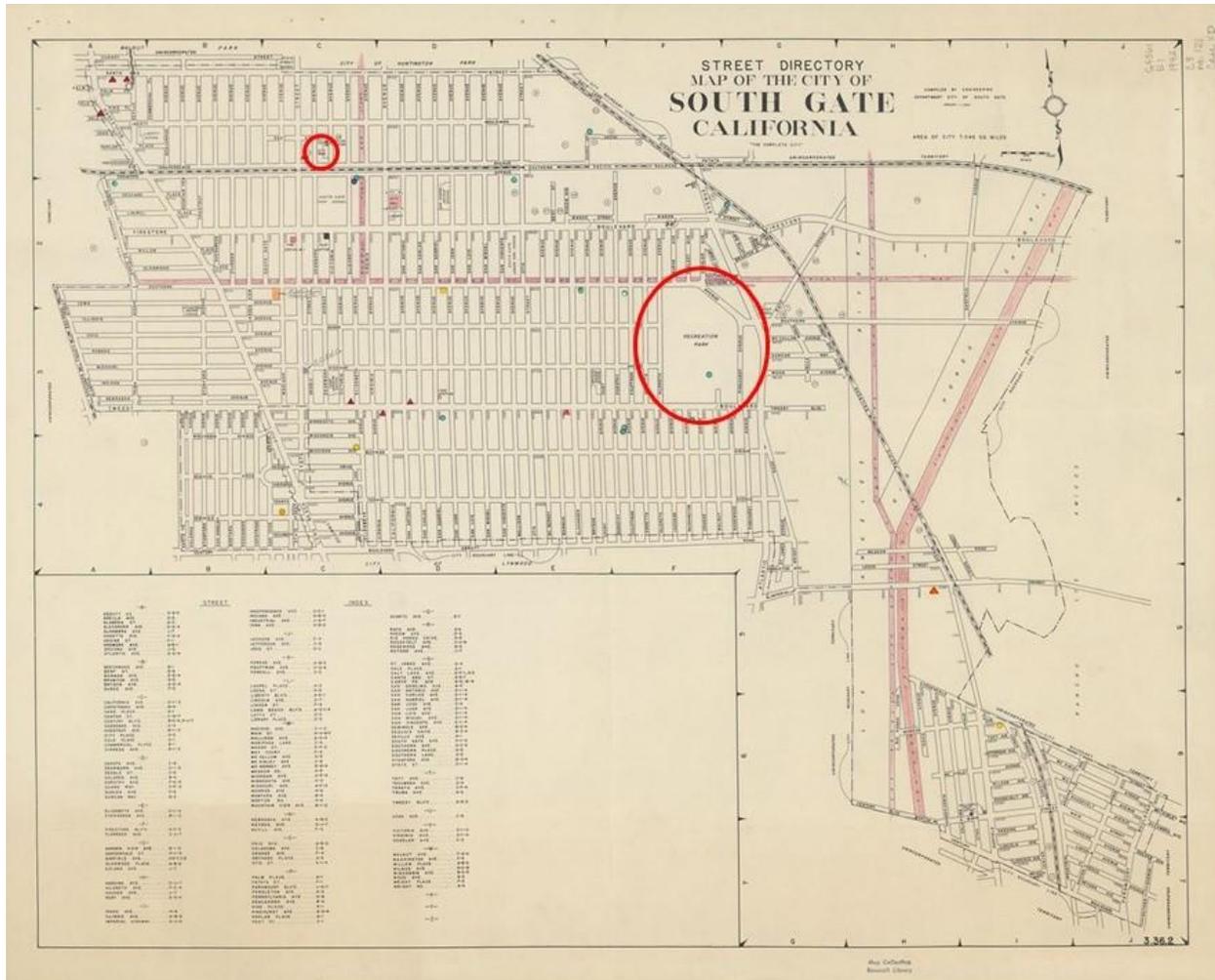


Figure 1. South Gate ca. 1942, with Old City Hall and South Gate Park circled (Online Archive of California).

Some local histories are explicit not only about the names of the Native American communities, but also their locations. For example, Stamps (1965:227) noted that:

Just why the Indians were more numerous around the South Gate area than the rest of the valley is not known, but recent research indicates one Indian rancheria, or village, was situated at the corner of what is now Post Street and Victoria Avenue, as nearly as can be determined. It was called 'Tibahag-Na' by the local inhabitants. This was also the site of South Gate's first City Hall.

Another rancheria was at the site of the present Municipal Park. It was called Ahau, or something similar.

Hutungna is a third Native American place name that is sometimes associated with the South Gate area. King (1993:28) was probably the first to propose this association, although his study seems to put the settlement southwest of South Gate proper. Following King, archaeologists David Stone and Robert Sheets suggested that Hutungna was located along today's Alameda Street in the vicinity of Interstate 105, roughly where Lynwood, Watts, and South Gate come together (Stone and Sheets 1993:5).

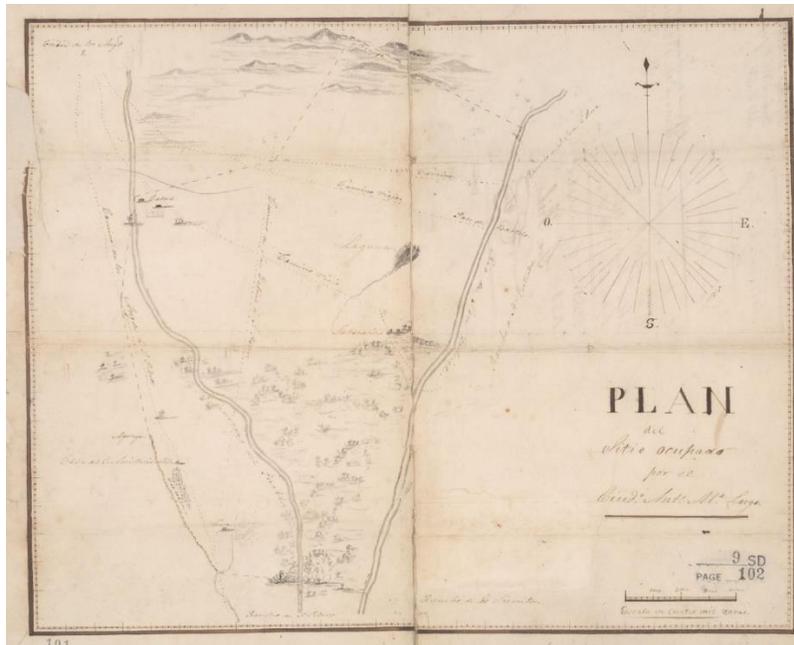


Figure 2. Rancho San Antonio (United States District Court [California : Southern District] 1849).

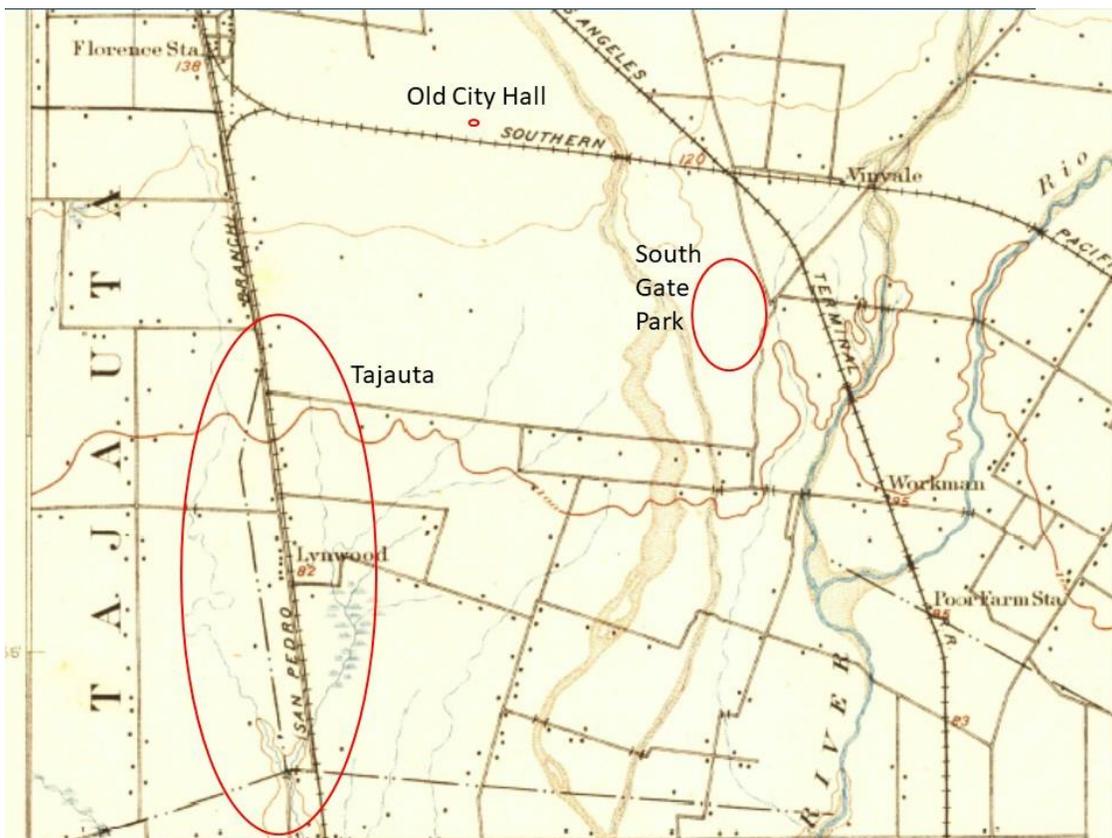


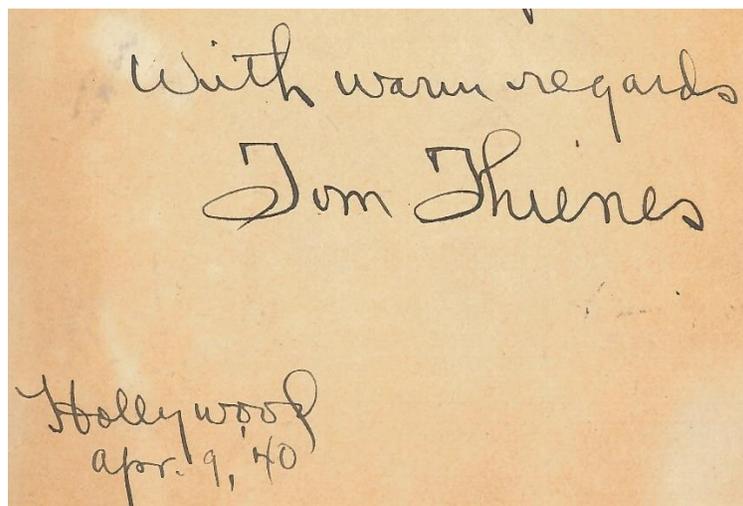
Figure 3. USGS 1896 topographic map, with Old City Hall and South Gate Park circled.

A close examination of the evidence shows that the specific rancherias of Hutungna, Tibahangna, and Ahau were almost certainly not in South Gate. However, these persistent local beliefs did not emerge from nothing. There is some evidence that Native American archaeological sites existed in the vicinity of the old City Hall. South Gate Park is located on what is clearly a topographically favorable site for a village and may have also been the site of inadvertent archaeological discoveries in the early history of South Gate. Moreover, the area bordering South Gate, east of Alameda Street where Watts and Lynwood are today, was the site of a different Gabrielino rancheria, Tajauta. The remainder of this article considers the ethnohistoric and archaeological evidence for Gabrielino settlements in and around South Gate, and considers how Hutungna, Tibahangna, and Ahau came to be misidentified with South Gate.

TOM THIENES AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS

The idea that Tibahangna and Ahau were somewhere within today's South Gate is promoted primarily in two semi-anonymous local histories prepared by city booster organizations. The city's Bicentennial Heritage Committee (1976) pieced together the volume "South Gate: 1776-1976." The local Chamber of Commerce provided material that was reworked as "The Historical Volume and Reference Works" (Stamps 1965). Both books describe South Gate's contact period inhabitants in such similar language that it implies the existence of a single *urtext* from which both cribbed. It is not difficult to identify the source underlying both books. There is one unpublished work that appears in both their bibliographies. The unpublished manuscript is also very important to academic histories of South Gate (Thienes 1942; Figure 4).

Thomas Lovelle Thienes was born in Indiana in 1883. College educated, he initially lived and worked in the Midwest. He visited California at least once in the 1920s. In a poem about the Capistrano Mission, he writes that he "felt the charm of legendry" and was transported to the past "Until I reached the booth of souvenirs / Which brought me back to nineteen twenty-four" (Thienes 1924). He relocated to California sometime between 1920 and 1930, settling first in Carmel. He moved to the Los Angeles area, where his daughter Geraldine went into stage acting and married film actor Dwight Hauser sometime after 1935. At the time he wrote his 1942 volume on the history of South Gate, he and his wife Irene lived in rented rooms in Hollywood (Figure 4). He informed a census taker in 1940 that his occupation was newspaper advertising (Internet Movie Database n.d.; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1940). He died in California in 1951.



With warm regards
Tom Thienes
Hollywood
Apr. 9, 40

Figure 4. Tom Thienes' signature, inscribed in "Whimseys" (document in the author's collection).

Thienes (1942) prepared his manuscript as a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project in 1941 and 1942. The WPA more famously produced state guidebooks, including one for California, and guides to cities including Los Angeles (Works Progress Administration 1939, 1941). Such a work devoted to a suburban city is unusual in the WPA corpus.

I have identified only one extant, publicly available copy of Thienes (1942). I could find no other versions to compare with this singular draft. There will be no variorum studies of this source. The book does not appear in the Online Computer Library Center's global network of library catalogs, WorldCat. Stamps (1965) reported that the South Gate Chamber of Commerce once held a copy of Thienes' book, but they could not locate it when I contacted them. Similarly, the book was formerly catalogued in South Gate's Leland R. Weaver Library, the South Gate branch of the county library, but it disappeared from the shelves before I looked for it in 2019. The South Gate Civic Center Museum has no collections relating to Native Americans or contact period South Gate, and the museum could find no copy of Thienes' manuscript in their holdings.

The manuscript is a semi-finished, bound draft kept in the California Room of the Norwalk Library of the Los Angeles County Public Library system (Figure 5). It appears to be roughly complete, but is clearly not a finished work. It mentions maps in the text that do not appear in the manuscript, and some material is repetitive. It is likely that World War II, which ended the WPA, cut its preparation short, just as the war interrupted so much else.

According to Thienes (1942:1), "Recent research for the story of South Gate disclosed that a rancheria named Tibahag-na was located approximately on the site, or within an arrow's flight, of the old City Hall, Post Street and Victoria Avenue, and another such village, Ahau, close to the picnic grounds of Recreation Park." It seems clear that the recent research is Thienes' own, but he unfortunately provides no evidence and offers no rationale for how he came to these conclusions.

As a newspaperman by profession, one would expect Thienes to have many other publications, some of which may detail local histories and shed light on his South Gate research. But his use of pen names complicates the effort to track his career. Under the pen name Tum-T-Ness he published a series of poems in the *Chicago Daily News* that he later collected and, with the title *Whimseys*, published in book form under both his pen name and his legal name (Thienes 1926). Under another penname, Tom T. Ness, Thienes wrote *Short of Murder*, a crime thriller set in Massachusetts in which a newspaperman solves a murder involving a missing first edition novel by Nathaniel Hawthorne (Ness 1948). We know without a doubt that he wrote this book, as it is dedicated to his daughter and my copy (an ex-library book) has his legal name stamped on the spine. Thienes' use of pen names appears to have been more of another whimsey than a genuine attempt to hide his identity. "If I go under my nom de quill," his protagonist asks in *Short of Murder*, "particularly while pursuing my professional work, what right have you to object?" (Ness 1948:132).

If additional manuscript copies of Thienes (1942) are located, they may have additional material that is not contained in the manuscript held by the Norwalk library. However, this manuscript is likely to be Thienes' only foray into California history. If he left behind any other publications about Native Americans or South Gate, or an unpublished archive of any kind, I have failed to locate it. As it stands, we are left with a series of interrelated questions: Do any of the place names attributed to South Gate—Tibahangna, Ahau, and Houtgna—have any real connection to the area? Are there any archaeological sites associated with the locations identified by Thienes? Finally, why did Thienes associate these particular names with these specific locations?

THE PLACE NAMES

It is fruitful to consider first the evidence surrounding the names that have been attributed to South Gate's Native American rancherias. Despite the claims of local historians, none of these names were recorded by Spanish explorers. All the available evidence regarding the names Tibahangna, Ahau, and Houtgna indicates that these places existed outside the boundaries of today's City of South Gate.

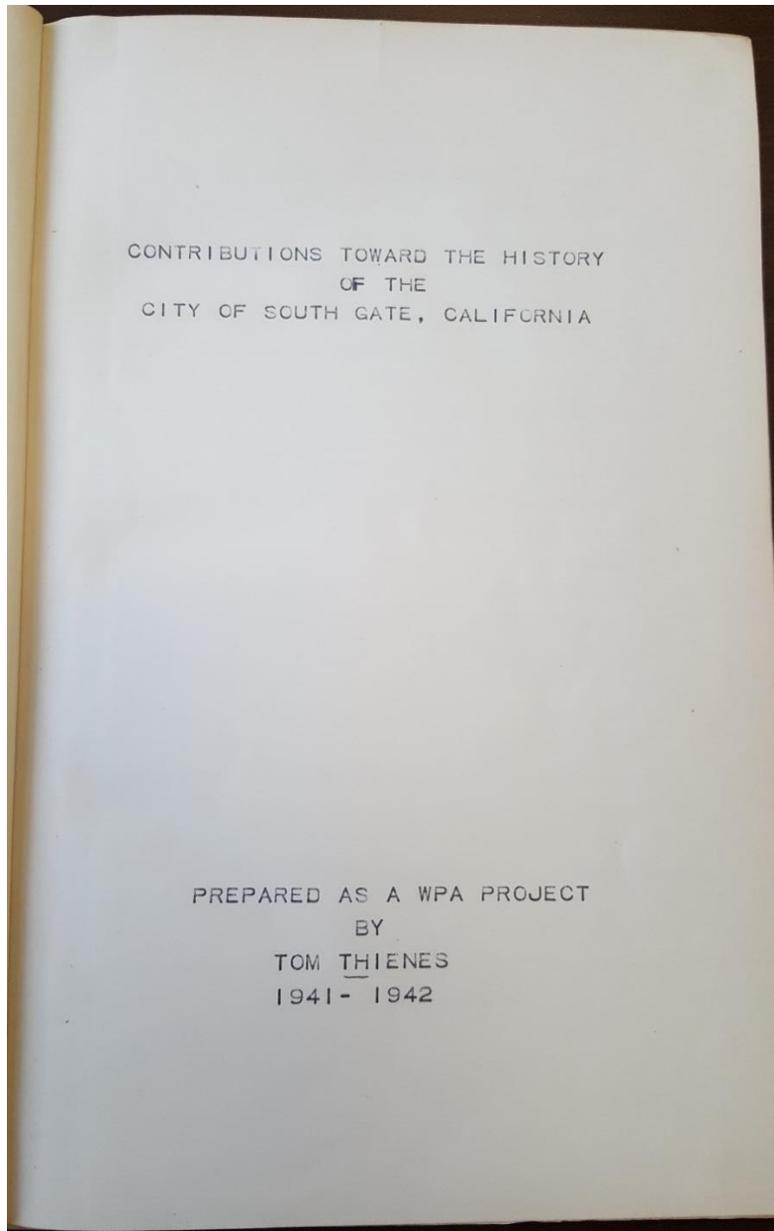


Figure 5. Title page for “Contributions Toward the History of the City of South Gate, California” (courtesy of Los Angeles County Library, Norwalk Library).

Tibahagna

Tibahagna appears in Hugo Reid’s 1852 letters to the *Los Angeles Star* (Reid 1968:2). Reid included the name in his first letter, as the twenty-fifth name on his list of the “principal Lodges or Rancherías” of the Gabrielino. In his annotations to Reid’s letters, Robert Heizer noted that the place is probably identical with Tibajabet, Tivajavet, and Tiba, which appears 23 times between 1784 and 1813 in the San Gabriel Mission baptismal register. Reid’s account offers a geographical location of the rancheria. He equates the place with “Serritos.” By this, he obviously means the Rancho los Cerritos, the 27,000-acre land grant that occupied much of what is today Bellflower, Lakewood, Long Beach, Paramount, and Signal Hill.

Writing in 1852, did Hugo Reid equate “Serritos” with the location of his friend Jonathan Temple’s Los Cerritos Ranch House (CA-LAN-696)? Temple’s ranch house was only eight years old at the time. No Late Prehistoric or contact period settlement has yet been documented at the site, but Native American remains have been recovered there. In 1930, a cache of four discoids and seven cogstones were recovered during renovations at the ranch house (Koerper et al. 2006:122-123). Cogstones are generally believed to date to the early Millingstone Horizon, making them much earlier than the contact period. Archaeological excavations on the ranch house grounds have yielded brown ware pottery similar to that known to have been made by Native Americans (Evans 1969; Koerper and Flint 1978), as well as ocean fish remains that are indicative of Gabrielino fishing (Chace and Roeder 2019). A map of the Rancho San Pedro prepared by Henry Hancock for Manuel Dominguez’s land claim in 1859 shows three structures labeled “Indian Huts” just north of the Los Cerritos Ranch House (Hancock 1859). Moreover, the Rancho los Cerritos Foundation, which maintains the historic Los Cerritos Ranch House, has laid claim to the name Tibahangna and hosted an exhibit called *Tevaaxa’nga to Today* from September 28, 2018, until March 2020. Was there a contact period settlement here in addition to the indigenous laborers’ settlement?

Regardless of whether Tibahangna was located at the Los Cerritos Ranch House or somewhere else on the vast rancho, there is no connection between Tibahangna and the place where Thienes placed it, the former site of South Gate City Hall. The only part of South Gate that overlaps the former Rancho Los Cerritos is the Hollydale neighborhood, South Gate’s southeast tail. Tibahangna was definitely not located at the old City Hall, and was probably not located anywhere in what is today South Gate.

Ahau

Ahau is known from a single source. The name Ahau first appears in print in Kroeber (1907), who included the name in a table, which he introduced stating, “The following names of places in Gabrielino territory were obtained from an old Luiseño informant on the San Luis Rey river. They agree in part with those given by Reid, the stems of which are added in brackets. Some of the names may be Luiseño equivalents of Gabrielino forms” (Kroeber 1907:143-144). The relevant portion of the table (Kroeber 1907: 144) reads:

Ahauwit Los Alamitos, Cerritos [Pubu-, Tibaha-]

We therefore know that Kroeber’s Luiseño informant believed Ahauwit was the name of a place located on the Los Alamitos or Cerritos land grants, and that Kroeber believed the word might be the Luiseño name for either Tibahag-na or Pubug-na. Just as he equated Tibahagna with Rancho los Cerritos, Reid associated Pubugna with Rancho los Alamitos.

Ahauangna makes sense as a Luiseño place name. In fact, there is a hamlet in Luiseño territory that retains that name, although with a Hispanicized spelling instead of an Anglicized one. Aguanga is located in Riverside County, at the intersection of State Routes 79 and 371, in traditional Luiseño territory. It probably means Place of the Dog (Gunther 1984:6-7). It is very likely that a Gabrielino place might have the same name, or that the Luiseño might apply the name to a place in Gabrielino territory.

When Kroeber (1925:Plate 57) published his map of “Native Sites in Part of Southern California,” he placed the word “Ahau” between the modern San Gabriel and Los Angeles rivers, below the word “Tibaha.” The word hovers vaguely where Rancho los Alamitos bordered Rancho los Cerritos (Figure 6). The two words appear roughly at the location of the Rancho Los Cerritos Ranch House, in today’s North Long Beach. As discussed previously, is often assumed to be the location of Tibahangna.

After Kroeber’s map became available, Ahau (or Ahaunanga) became entrenched as the name of a site in North Long Beach. In his list of Gabrielino villages, Swanton (1953:491) did no more than describe locations shown on Kroeber’s map; “Ahau, near Los Angeles River north of Long Beach.” Johnston (1962: 85) speculated that, “Considering the growth of this city [Long Beach] northward from the sea it is quite possible that the fairly extensive site in the vicinity of Twentieth Street and Henderson may be the place

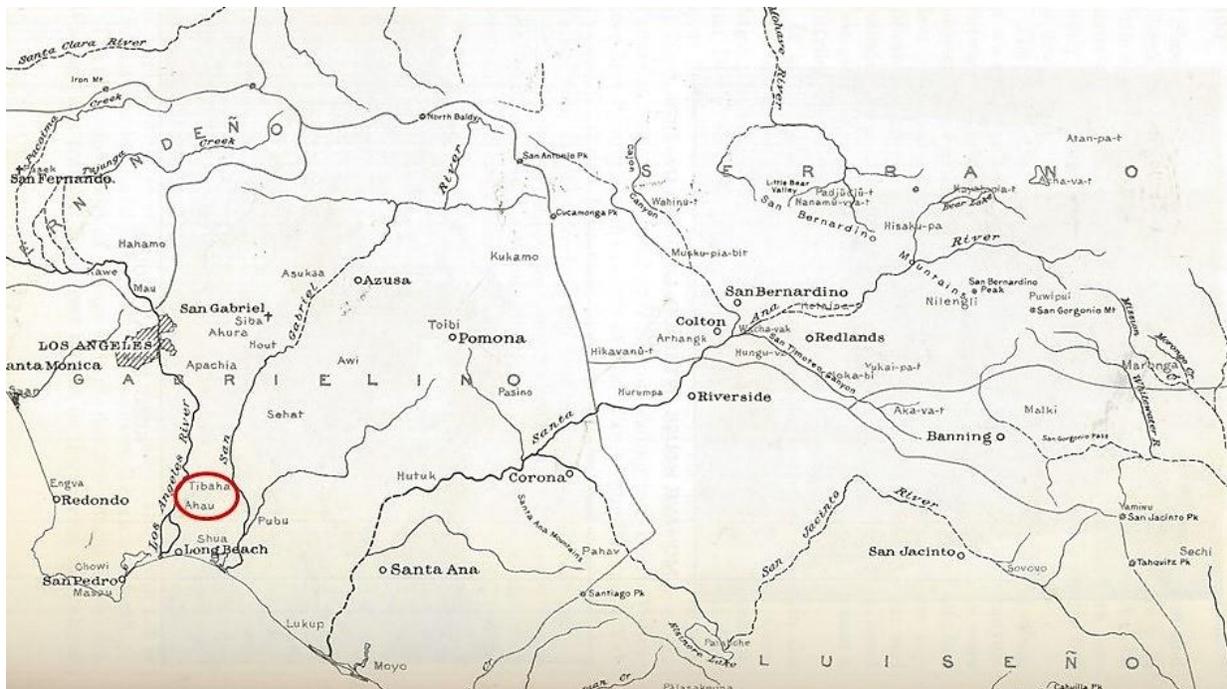


Figure 6. Kroeber's southern California ethnographic map, with "Tibaha" and "Ahau" circled in red (Kroeber 1925:Plate 57).

indicated." The site was later recorded by Keith Dixon (based almost entirely on Johnston's description) and is now known by the trinomial CA-LAN-695 (Dixon 1974). However, Johnston (1962:85-86) acknowledged that, "Long Beach abounds with evidences of its ancient inhabitants whose settlements might account, if it were possible now to learn their names, for many a 'lost' entry on the Mission registers." McCawley (1996:72) called the place Ahwaanga and vaguely placed it "on the southern coast." He included it among a list of villages dotted along littoral Los Angeles and Orange counties. All of these authorities—Swanton, Johnston, and McCawley—relied on Kroeber's single informant for the name and location of Ahau, but over the decades following Kroeber's monograph they built a mythology surrounding the location.

In short, very little can be determined about Ahau of Ahauanga or where it was located except that Kroeber had a Luiseno informant who believed Ahauwit was the name of a place located on the Los Alamitos or Cerritos land grants. As has been seen, the only part of South Gate that overlaps any part of these old grants is the Hollydale neighborhood. South Gate Park is not located on any portion of old Rancho Los Alamitos or Rancho Los Cerritos. As such, Ahau was probably not located in South Gate.

Houtgna and Tajauta

A third Native American place name that is sometimes associated with the South Gate area is Houtgna. Thienes is not responsible for this association, which can be traced to King (1993) and is more complicated than Thienes' claims. There is a named Native American place in this vicinity, but that place is not named Houtgna, it is named Tajauta.

Houtgna is the twenty-second name in Reid's list of Gabrielino lodges, and he associates the village with "Ranchito de Lugo." As part of a project that roughly paralleled Alameda Street, cutting along South Gate's western boundary, King (1993) suggested that Houtgna was located in the vicinity of the point where Watts, Willowbrook, Lynwood, and South Gate meet. Based on King's study, Stone and Sheets (1993) identified Alameda Street between El Segunda Boulevard and Tweedy Boulevard to be the location of

Houtgna. They surveyed the area, but failed to find any sites at this location (Stone and Sheets 1993:5). The topographic map documenting archaeological sites that is held by the South Central Coastal Information Center (SCCIC), the California Historical Resources Information System information center that covers Los Angeles, does not usually note Native American place names, but a marginal note in an unknown hand on the west side of the SCCIC's South Gate 1:24000 Topographic Map reads, "Possible vicinity of HA'UTNGA." King (1993:29-30) offered four main points for placing Houtgna in this vicinity:

- The location is a natural levy or landform that is ideal for human habitation.
- One site was already documented on that landform. CA-LAN-385, a site recorded by Tom King, includes human remains (King 1969).
- The Lugo family owned nearby Rancho Santa Ana, which could be the "Ranchito de Lugo" on which Reid locates Houtgna.
- Houtgna or Hutungna may be a corruption of Tajauta, the name of the rancho on which Watts and Willowbrook are located.

King's first point is convincing, and he accurately identified the cultural sensitivity of the landform. This landform is visible on the 1896 Downey 1:62500 USGS map as a slight rise (so low that it is not indicated by topographic lines) between two drainages (Figure 3). This landform is even more pronounced in Hall's irrigation map of southern California (Figure 7). Swamps are shown surrounding the landform in both maps. The twentieth century settlers of Lynwood in particular remembered the eastern side of this landform to be a peat bog (City of Lynwood 2012:19). But the landform appears to be split between Lynwood and Watts; it does not appear to extend as far north as South Gate. When Stone and Sheets (1993) suggested that the Native American place might reach as far north as South Gate, they generalized broadly based on Chester King's monograph.

This landform has been verified as an important place for Native American activity archaeologically. Thomas King (1969) recorded CA-LAN-385, a site including several burials, in 1969. A few years later, archaeological monitors working on the Alameda Corridor Project identified two additional human burial sites along the same landform. Both sites are located in the City of Lynwood, but are widely spaced. They are now documented as archaeological sites CA-LAN-2757 and CA-LAN-2792 (Horne 2000; Williams 1999). The three sites are spaced so widely apart that they are clearly not a single cemetery. Undoubtedly, this landform was intensively utilized in prehistory.

Chester King's idea that Ranchito de Lugo might be located on Rancho San Antonio is correct. Initially, it seems compelling that Ranchito de Lugo may even be located in the vicinity of the border of Lynwood, South Gate, Watts, and Willowbrook. However, this contention falls apart on close examination. Ranchito de Lugo was located on the opposite side of Rancho San Antonio.

As already noted, part of South Gate was granted to Don Antonio Maria Lugo. "Ranchito de Lugo" would seem to be an apt description of Don Antonio Maria Lugo's Home Tract, which was the last remnant of Rancho Santa Antonio that Don Antonio reserved for himself when he broke up the rancho among his adult children. Although Lugo did not break up his lands until 1855, Juan Antonio Lugo and his children already had their own homes scattered around Lugo's vast properties, and were responsible for specific parts of the rancho. The Home Tract may have already had its own identity in 1852. The Home Tract was the 4,252.7-acre segment of the former Rancho San Antonio that occupied much of today's Lynwood. It extended from the boundary between Compton and Lynwood to the boundary between Lynwood and South Gate, overlapping part of southern South Gate (Bicentennial Heritage Committee 1976:3). By the early twentieth century, a train station located between Lynwood and Watts was called the Lugo Station (Ray 1985:14); it likely stood on or near the Home Tract.

But the Home Tract was not the Ranchito de Lugo. The term Ranchito de Lugo is an equally appropriate appellation for other Lugo-owned territories within Rancho San Antonio. In 1823, Lugo was granted a tract of land in the area of today's Bell, which Lugo annexed to the much larger Rancho San Antonio (Whitehead 1976:23). This property, smaller than Lugo's other land grants, was most likely Ranchito de Lugo.



Figure 7. The Tajuata landform in 1888 (Hall 1888).

A placement of Houtgna in the Bell area also fits the ethnographic evidence, as was recognized by authorities before King’s (1993) publication. Kroeber (1925:Plate 57) shows “Hout” on his ethnographic map well to the east of Los Angeles, on the west bank of the San Gabriel River (Figure 6). Moreover, two of Harrington’s informants, Jose de los Santos Juncos and Felicitas Serrano Montano, stated that the “Little Ranch of Lugo” was in close proximity to La Jaboneria; de los Santos Juncos added that it was “by tile factories” (as cited in McCawley 1995:58). According to Reid (1968:2), La Jaboneria itself was the site of Chokishg-na.

The Jaboneria, or soap factory, was an important landmark established by Lemuel Carpenter. It is shown in the earliest maps of Rancho San Antonio (Figure 3). The soap factory stood west of what was then the San Gabriel River, at a crossing of the river, roughly where Telegraph Road and Interstate 5 cross what is today the Rio Hondo, in today’s City of Commerce. The term La Jaboneria was also applied to a 1,628-acre tract of Rancho San Antonio that was created on the west bank of today’s Rio Hondo after Antonio Maria Lugo broke up Rancho San Antonio (King 1862). The land tract of La Jaboneria was bordered on the north by property owned by Maria Antonio Lugo Yorba, on the south by land owned by Vicente Lugo, and on the west by the property of Jose Maria Lugo (King 1862). These properties likely already had individual identities in 1852. None of these properties overlapped with today’s South Gate. La Jaboneria and Ranchito de Lugo were in northeastern Rancho San Antonio, perhaps in what is today the City of Bell, Bell Gardens, Commerce, Cudahy, or Maywood.

Returning to Tajuata, King is no doubt correct that the name is a Hispanicization of a Gabrielino place name. Kroeber (1925:897) appears to have been the first to suggest it in print, and Harrington’s Lugo informant told him the name was Native American (McCawley 1996:58). Tajuata is believed by historians of Watts (on what basis I have thus far been unable to determine)¹ to mean “low bluffs” (Ray 1985:4) or “the low bluffs on the North” (Collins 1980:38). Houtgna and Tajuata are both Native American place names, but they are not the same place.

The name Tajauta survives because it was also the name of a rancho, Rancho Tajauta, also known as Rancho de Los Cuervos. Rancho Tajauta bordered Rancho San Antonio to the east; it was never part of Rancho San Antonio, and was never owned by the Lugo family. Governor Manuel Micheltoarena granted one square league of land, including what would become Watts and Willowbrook, to Anastasio Avila (or Abila) in 1843. At Anastasio Avila's death, his land passed to his sons before being subdivided (Adler 1977). No part of Rancho Tajauta overlapped the neighboring Rancho Santa Ana. Rancho Tajauta was subdivided in the nineteenth century, and it is possible that a member of the Lugo family owned some part of Rancho Tajauta after it was subdivided. This may explain why a member of the Lugo family living in South San Gabriel told J. P. Harrington that Tajuata belonged to the Lugos, and that the site was known to them as El Rancho Nuevo (as cited in McCawley 1996:58). However, the Lugos cannot be said to have owned Rancho Tajauta.

As finally confirmed by the terms of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the grant was bounded roughly by the present-day streets of Firestone Boulevard to the north, Rosecrans Boulevard to the south, Central Avenue to the west, and Alameda Street to the east, although the actual land grant was much larger. The property extended from the western border of Lugo's Rancho San Antonio all the way to the eastern border of Rancho Sausal Redondo in modern-day Inglewood, the property of Anastasio Avila's son, Antonio Ygnacio Avila. A surviving *Diseño del Rancho Tajauta* shows that, as it was originally granted, the rancho included the heights in the vicinity of today's Westmont and West Athens (U.S. District Court [California : Southern District] 1854).

The heights of Westmont and West Athens would seem to be the most likely part of the rancho to be called "low bluffs." However, it is more likely that Tajauta was a village and that it was located on the long, narrow, natural levy identified by King (1993). In addition to including the three archaeological sites (CA-LAN-385, CA-LAN-2757, and CA-LAN-2792), there are sites known ethnographically to have been located on this landform. The last remnant of the Avila family property was located on the property bounded by Alameda Street to the west, Central Avenue to the east, 116th Street to the south, and 112th Street to the north—an area coterminous with today's Imperial Courts housing project. The Avila family adobe survived into the twentieth century and was located at the intersection of Grape and 115th streets (*Watts Advertiser-Review* 1938). Harrington's Lugo informant told him, "The old adobe house was a quarter of a block west of the spring site," where there were tules (as cited in McCawley 1995:58). Rancho Tajauta follows a familiar pattern, where settlers established their homestead at the best possible location, near a spring, on a site that had previously been occupied (and possibly was still occupied) by a Native American settlement.

In summary, Houtgna and Tajauta were two different places. Houtgna was located in the northeastern part of Rancho San Antonio, outside the boundaries of today's South Gate. Rancho Tajauta was a land grant made to Anastasio Avila that was most likely named for a Native American rancharia situated on the natural levy identified by King (1993), on which three burial sites have been recorded archaeologically, and where a Mexican adobe and a spring are known to have been located. The rancho and the Native American site were southwest of South Gate, and neither Houtgna nor Tajauta were ethnohistoric locations within modern South Gate.

THIENES' PLACES

Since none of the proposed ethnohistoric names are really associated with South Gate, we are left to question, what about the places Tom Thienes proposed? Thienes was very specific about the locations he claimed were the sites of Native American rancharias. Why these of all places (see below)?

The Old City Hall Site

The old City Hall mentioned by Thienes was located at the southwest corner of Post Street and Victoria Street. When Southgate Gardens was subdivided, "The streets of Post, State and Victoria were designated the 'business district'" (Bicentennial Heritage Committee 1976:13), anchored by lots set aside

for a church to the north (now Community Presbyterian Church) and a school to the south. This particular area appears to have been chosen for the business district because of its central location within the 1918 boundaries of Southgate Gardens. In 1923, not long after incorporation, the Board of Trustees of the city acquired two lots at the southwest corner of Post and Victoria streets, on which City Hall was built (Figure 8; Stamps 1965:232). There were no antique adobes, springs, hilltops, or any other artificial or natural feature that led to the selection of this location. The building came to be known as “old City Hall” after the construction of the current city hall building, on California Avenue between Ardmore Avenue and Firestone Boulevard, in 1941. Old City Hall still stood when Thienes (1942) penned his manuscript, but has since been demolished. Today the location is a courtyard at the northeast corner of the campus of Independence Elementary School.

Examining the 1896 Downey 1:62500 USGS map (Figure 3), there seems nothing especially promising about the location, other than that it is only slightly more than 0.5-mile from the old Arroyo del Pueblo. No remnant of that tributary of the Los Angeles River exists today; in the nineteenth century, it was important enough that the Southern Pacific Railroad built a cement-pillared bridge over it. The bridge was rediscovered in 1970 when a hump in the road was removed (Bicentennial Heritage Committee 1976:40-41). The location has not been subjected to formal archaeological study, but an accidental find in the vicinity of the old City Hall may explain why Thienes believed this was the site of an ancient village. The details are recorded by the Bicentennial Heritage Committee (1976:40):

In the early 1930's, when the street department were excavating in the vicinity of Dearborn, Liberty, and Post streets, a skull was dug up, and the workmen took it to Dr. [John] Aldinger's [dental] office, around the corner [at the northeast corner of State and Independence streets].

“It was definitely an Indian skull, though difficult to determine the age. It was rough like a male skull would be, aging, though not decomposed. The teeth were worn down, due to the type of food eaten, but otherwise, in good condition. I really wanted that skull, but it was taken by the authorities, probably to the coroner, and I never heard what final disposition was made of it,” said Dr. Aldinger.

Dearborn Avenue between Liberty and Post streets is “within an arrow's flight” (Thienes 1942:1) of the old City Hall (Figure 9). I have uncovered no other information about this archaeological find. We know from this description there was at least a skull (and one would suspect a human skeleton) with heavily worn teeth encountered by road crews. We do not know the depth, although the find was probably relatively shallow—there are sewer lines and other utilities beneath Dearborn, but no storm sewers or other excavated infrastructure that would have been constructed by roadworkers. It is unknown whether there were any artifacts uncovered with the skull. It is not even clear from this brief description whether indeed there is an archaeological site, and not simply an isolated partial skeleton. However, it seems that the reason Thienes pinpointed the location as the site of Tibahangna is because he knew either of this specific discovery of a human skull, or about another inadvertent archaeological discovery in this vicinity.

South Gate Park Site

This leaves Thienes' other proposed village location, Ahau, “close to the picnic grounds of Recreation Park” (Thienes 1942:1). South Gate Recreation Park, the city's first municipal park, was established in about 1938. The undeveloped 97.5-acre property bounded by Tweedy in the south, Southern in the north, west of Atlantic was forfeited to the county due to tax delinquency and was purchased by the city (Bicentennial Heritage Committee 1976:23). The picnic grounds are located today just where they were in 1942, at the southwest corner of the park, at the northwest corner of Hildreth Street and Tweedy Boulevard.

The location of South Gate Park looks more propitious for a habitation site than does the old City Hall site. The park is located between two beds of the Los Angeles River, the modern bed of the Los Angeles River

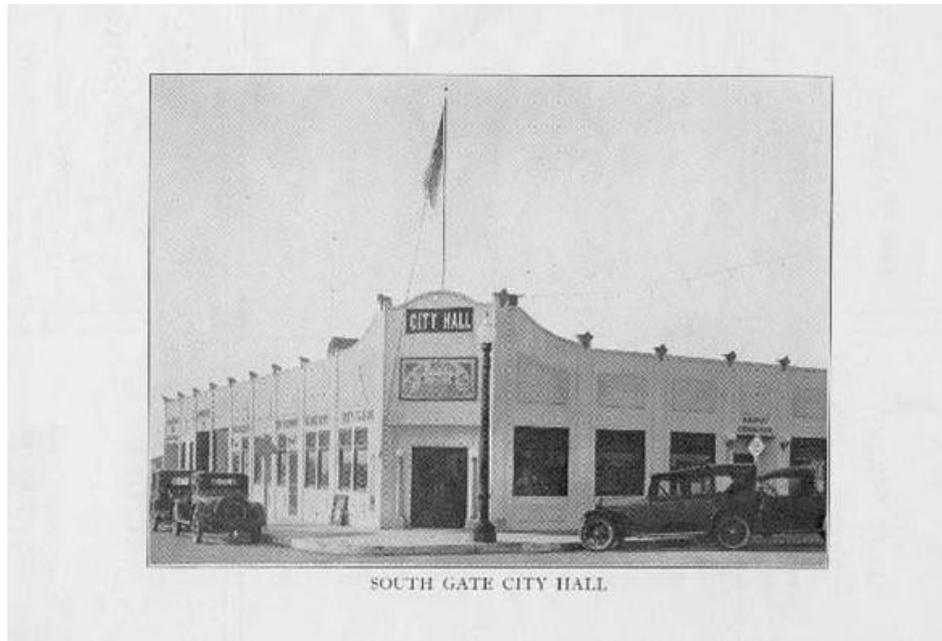


Figure 8. Old City Hall (County of Los Angeles Public Library n.d.).

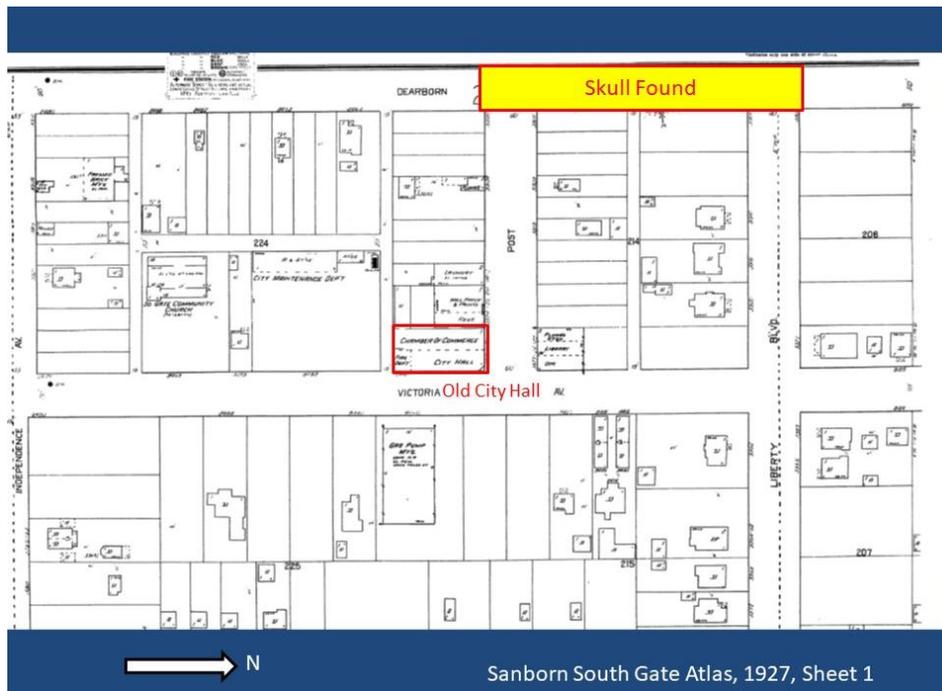


Figure 9. Sanborn map of Old City Hall, indicating location of skull (Sanborn 1927:Sheet 1).

to the east and the Arroyo del Pueblo to the west. The topography of the location—on a slight rise between two drainages—is very similar to the topography of the natural levy on which Tajauta is located, except that the site is bounded by higher energy rivers instead of swamps. As shown on the 1896 USGS Downey map, the site is near where three roads already came together in the nineteenth century. Today the roads are known

as Atlantic Avenue, Southern Avenue, and Rayo Avenue. Southern Avenue was at that time part of Stewart and Gray roads, which crossed the Los Angeles River at a bridge that was washed out in the floods of the 1930s and never rebuilt, and the site is within two-thirds of a mile of that old bridge. This is speculative, but nineteenth century roads are often preceded by earlier Native American trade routes. It is very likely that these roads were trade routes prehistorically, and the bridge location may have been at a ford.

South Gate Park has never been subjected to any archaeological studies documented in the SCCIC. I have found no evidence that an archaeological site has ever been found there. However, I suspect that Thienes heard about an inadvertent archaeological find either within the park or in the adjacent residential neighborhood and decided that it was the location of a Gabrielino village.

THE NAMES, REVISITED

The two locations Thienes pinpointed as Gabrielino village sites are probably both archaeological sites. There is an archaeological site located near the old City Hall (Thienes 1942:1). I have not found documentation of an archaeological site in the vicinity of South Gate Park, but the topography suggests it would have been a good place for a settlement. The first two names in Thienes' list of acknowledgements are Mark R. Harrington, Curator of the Southwest Museum, and Edwin F. Walker, Research Associate at the Southwest Museum. Thienes' sources also include members of the Lugo and Tweedy families and the descendants of other settlers who moved into the area before the establishment of Southgate Gardens. He also spoke to a host of city employees, businessmen, and newspaper editors (Thienes 1942:143). Any of these individuals could have informed Thienes of unanticipated archaeological finds made during such activities as farming, housebuilding, roadbuilding, or other infrastructure construction. Assuming that both these locations are archaeological sites, why did Thienes pick the specific names Tibahagna and Ahau for them?

Thienes included three anthropological sources in his bibliography. One is Hugo Reid's first letter, published as a pamphlet by the Southwestern Museum, which documents the names of the Gabrielinos' "principal lodges," including Tibahangna (Reid 1852). The second is an undated Southwest Museum publication by Edwin F. Walker purportedly titled *Indians of the Southwest*. This specific volume does not exist in WorldCat, and I suspect that in reality Thienes used Walker's pamphlet *Indians of Southern California* (Walker 1937), which mentions neither Tibahangna nor Ahau.

The third source Thienes consulted was Alfred Kroeber's *Handbook of the Indians of California*. Thienes (1942) described in detail the meandering of the Los Angeles River as it changed beds during the historic period. In that volume, he stated that the river was west of its current channel during the Spanish period, in the area of modern-day Alameda Street. Having assumed that there were two Gabrielino villages in South Gate, one near the old City Hall and one near the park, Thienes appears to have consulted Kroeber's map of "Native Sites in Part of Southern California" (Kroeber 1925:Plate 57). There he would have seen two place names situated between the Los Angeles and San Gabriel rivers labeled Tibahagna and Ahau. Having decided that the Los Angeles River was in the vicinity of today's Alameda Street, he concluded that these two names belonged to the two sites in South Gate. The map shows Tibaha north of Ahau, so Thienes believed that Tibahagna was located at the northern site, near the old City Hall, and Ahau was located at the southern site, South Gate Park.

CONCLUSIONS

Three Gabrielino place names have been proposed for specific locations within or adjacent to South Gate: Tibahagna, Ahau, and Houtnga. I have demonstrated that Tibahagna and Ahau cannot be appropriately applied to sites within South Gate, and that the Native American site adjacent to South Gate is not Houtnga, it is Tajauta.

We will probably never know the Gabrielino names of any of the places within the limits of the modern city of South Gate. It is unbelievable that any seven-square-mile area within Gabrielino territory had no place names. However, they have been lost to memory with the passage of time and the replacement of populations. Moreover, it is unlikely that any archival or published sources preserving these place names will be discovered.

Thirty years ago, in an article about long vanished archaeological sites in southern Los Angeles County, True (1990:79) observed that,

It is then, perhaps, somewhat audacious to propose the publication of data from sites that have never been excavated, from which only surface finds are known, and for which most of the potentially meaningful data are based on notes and memories dating back as much as 40 years. However, since so little is known about much of the Los Angeles Basin, even marginally documented site data should be recorded and made available when possible.

True was working from personal notes and memories, but his comments remain true today. Many sites in the Los Angeles Basin are known only from such sources as newspaper articles and local histories. The scraps of evidence that can be gleaned from historic popular publications should continue to be gleaned for what they are worth.

Before I conducted this study, there were no prehistoric sites documented in historic downtown South Gate, and I believe no sites documented in the whole of South Gate. Now we have sufficient information to document the location of an isolated archaeological find and to identify a place of archaeological sensitivity. These scraps from the past, preserved by non-professionals though they may be, are the beginnings of an archaeology of South Gate.

NOTE

1. The answer might be contained in this document: “Los Angeles Central Library, California Room. Untitled, unpublished paper on the historical background of Watts, 1873-1930” (Ray 1985:86). However, due to the coronavirus shutdown of the library system, I have been unable to consult this document, or even determine whether it survives.

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