CHAPTER 7

HISTORIC SETTLEMENT PATTERN: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The prehistoric settlement pattern discussed in Chapter 6 may appear rather static, with little room for innovation or change. This was certainly not the case; many aspects of change leave no discernible trace for the archaeologist to interpret. Only for relatively recent times, well into the 19th century, do we have direct knowledge of the causes of change in patterns of local settlement and demography. As our studies take us forward into the historic past, oral tradition and written sources can be used to reconstruct these patterns, often with specific reference to the Lake Sonoma Area itself. As history is often reckoned in connection with critical events, these sources tend to document major disruptions to existing patterns of life, providing an interesting contrast to the picture of a timeless equilibrium implied by the description of delicately tuned seasonal movements.

NATIVE AMERICAN SETTLEMENT

Native Americans in the Early Historic Period

The coming of Europeans caused change to the entire native population on a hitherto unprecedented scale. Yet there is every reason to believe that influences such as economic innovation, local environmental change, regional warfare, and the spread of new religion had brought about similar, though less drastic, types of change in the past, the details of which are now lost to us. There is linguistic and archaeological evidence, for example, that the first inhabitants of the project area were displaced by Pomoan “invaders,” who expanded from the Clear Lake region to take over most of the North Coast Ranges. There is also evidence from the more recent past that major disruption of native northern Californian lifeways began before the first Spanish or Russian settlement in the area. Some scholars believe that intermittent contact between 16th-century coastal explorers and California Indians may have resulted in the rapid spread of European diseases throughout the region. Thus, the native population may have been considerably reduced before European settlement of California.

In a study of population trends, Sherburne Cook estimated that the number of missionized Indians declined by about 62 percent during the mission period. Lack of resistance to introduced diseases—smallpox and influenza, in particular—took its toll on the native population, both mission-dwelling and free. In general, the mission Indians fared worse.

The population of non-mission northern and valley groups was depleted through warfare, disease, and forced removal, but the native peoples eventually adopted types of behavior, including new techniques of defensive warfare, calculated to stop further loss of territory and integrity and to insure their ultimate survival. These Native Californians managed to retain much of their social and religious character while appropriating and modifying a few features of White material culture. Cook suggested that the non-mission Indian had evolved new behavior patterns which, “if he had been left alone, might have permitted him to cope on fairly even terms with the invading race” (1).

Beginning in 1823 with the establishment of the Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma, native groups to the north of Santa Rosa were subject to raids, capture, and conversion by Iberoamerican forces. Local Pomoans were taken as neophytes to the Sonoma Mission, but many stayed only a short time before fleeing and returning home. The Russian Baron von Wrangel, who traveled up the Russian River in 1833, wrote of the fate of some of these fugitives. His expedition stopped with a group consisting mainly of Indians who had escaped from the Sonoma Mission and lived in the “impenetrable forests,” ready to repel any further attacks by outsiders. Although on more friendly terms with the natives than were the Iberoamericans, the Russians also forcibly removed Pomoan women and young boys, taking them to Russia as wives and servants.

It was just before this time, during the 1820s according to knowledgeable Pomoan tribal scholars, that a Spanish priest arrived at the principal Makahmo village, located near the present community of Asti, and began forcibly baptizing its inhabitants in the village assembly house.
One of the local captains and his supporters protested the priest’s action and proposed that the man be killed. Other villagers were afraid that if the priest were opposed he would curse the entire community. Finally, the dissenters secretly moved out of the village and, in their search for another territory to claim, came upon the Dry Creek uplands.

This location had the twin advantages of being both off the main north-south trail, and therefore relatively secure from further alien incursions, and being unclaimed by other tribelets at that time. Members of the group later moved into the upper Dry Creek Valley, either joining or replacing the area’s original inhabitants. One Indian elder had been told that some of the original (Dry Creek) people had congregated at a large, remote village in the rugged area beneath Pritchett Peaks. Some of its residents were said to have starved to death when, in later years, they became too fearful of being seen by settlers even to venture out of their hidden village to gather food. This story may refer to the village of Amacha, probably located at archaeological site CA-Son-598, which was excavated in 1979 (2).

The archaeological remains of Amacha included a complex of 21 housepits on the south bank of Dry Creek, directly below Pritchett Peaks. A petroglyph rock containing 31 cupules was located at one end of the site, just above Dry Creek. Archaeologists found no evidence of midden and practically no cultural materials at Amacha, unlike other village sites. Based on this negative evidence and the apparently unfinished state of some of the housepits, archaeologists suggest that Amacha was only occupied for a short time and may have been abandoned prior to its completion (3). Given the number of housepits, however, the population of the village would have been relatively large—perhaps more than 100 people. According to Pomoan scholars, the Bill family lived at Amacha until they were routed out by soldiers in the 1850s.

The brief period of the 1830s through the 1850s saw the conversion of the Mihilakawna and their neighbors from a condition of self-sufficiency to one of dependency on wage work, with starvation as the alternative. The transition resulted from loss of land and an enormous death rate, caused both by military means and by the new epidemics of smallpox, syphilis, and influenza that swept the North Bay area,
decimating the Indian population and making many of those who remained unable to gather sufficient food in traditional ways. Among the military and paramilitary actions were Mexican General Vallejo’s raids of the 1830s, during which villages were destroyed. The native inhabitants of the northern frontier were eventually subdued; many people took refuge in the hills, while others stayed on at their few remaining villages, which were being engulfed by the newly established Mexican ranchos.

In 1843 José German Peña filed a petition for a land grant in the Dry Creek and Alexander valleys. The sketch map filed with his claim indicated four Indian villages, or rancherias, possibly including Ahkamodot (CA-Son-612) to the north of the Peña adobe. Before the Gold Rush, Indians performed nearly all of the work on California ranchos. To avoid rancho life, many Native Americans abandoned their principal villages and, in small groups, settled remote regions of their original territory; some of the archaeological sites in the Lake Sonoma Area date to this period of dispersal. The flight to the hinterlands caused labor problems on many ranchos, including the neighboring Sotoyome grant near Healdsburg. Such labor shortages were commonly overcome by kidnapping native peoples. This practice continued well into the 1860s, when Indian children were sold by kidnappers to settlers as household servants (4).

Americans rapidly settled the Dry Creek Valley during the 1850s. As described in Chapter 5, some squatted on what was the Peña’s claim, while others ventured onto public lands. According to the 1852 census, William Miles (father of Elizabeth Pritchett) and his two sons, the Peñas, Isaac Staley (uncle of Malinda Miller Scott), Joel Ragan, and a few other settlers were then living in the Dry Creek Valley. The census also noted that 80 Indians lived on the Peña Ranch, some of whom undoubtedly worked as vaqueros. The fortunes of the Peñas and these Native Californians were closely linked. The Pomoans supplied the Peñas with a cheap labor force and, due to their large number, an advantage in holding the Tzabaco Rancho against squatters. In return, the Peñas supplied the Pomoans with food, clothing, and a place to live in relative security. A native woman, Juana Cook, was married to Pancho Peña, the brother of grant holder José German.

As the settlement of northern California quickened in the 1850s, an effort was made to move the native peoples onto newly created reservations.
about 1856 the Pomoan Indians were “rounded up” from the Russian River and Clear Lake areas and “driven north.” The event is known to contemporary Indians as the “Death March” for the number who died during the one hundred or so miles of forced march (5). This removal also coincided with a period of rapid settlement in the Dry Creek Valley. The Pritchett family arrived in 1855 and, according to family lore, purchased a cabin from a man whose partner had been killed by Indians (6). This cabin was less than two miles from Amacha.

The loss of their native supporters must have been a severe blow to the Peñas. As early as November 1853, the heirs of José German had sold much of the Tzabaco Rancho to John Frisbie (7), while apparently retaining possession. At the time of the Death March, Pancho helped his wife, Juana, and her family to escape to the coast. The 1856 harvest was disastrous for the Peñas. It was reportedly a dry year, they had no Native Americans to help with the work, and their grain field burned. Later that year, in November, the Peñas sold the adobe and 132 acres to D.D. Phillips.

Native Americans after the Dispersal

After a time, many Pomoans returned to Dry Creek in small groups. They found that in their absence their land had been usurped by settlers, their villages burned, and their grinding tools taken. The latter must have been a particularly hard blow to the returning refugees, as the stone mortar and pestle were essential for the manufacture of acorn flour and pinole, which constituted these people’s staple food. With many of their villages now on “private” land and the ever-present threat of reprisals because of their return from exile, most Indians feared to reoccupy their previously held sites. After a period of dispersed living, some groups formed a small community on Dry Creek, apparently on land still held by the Peñas and possibly on the site of the old village of Akhamodot.

From the 1860 census, it appears that while the Dry Creek Valley south of Peña Creek, including the old adobe, was held and farmed by settlers, the upper Dry Creek Valley was occupied by “rancheros,” including Francis (a.k.a., Pancho or Francisco) Peña (8). Francis resided with a Chilean ranchero named Powell Maxberona; the unlocated Dry Creek Pomo site whose name translates to “where Powell is” may relate to him and the Pomoan presence at this site. By this time, the Peñas’ land claim had been confirmed by the District Court, making their title more legally binding. By then they had sold the Tzabaco Rancho for a second time to John Frisbee, this time reserving 200 acres for their own use (9).

The Peñas’ 200-acre property was north of the adobe and south of Dutcher Creek on the east side of Dry Creek. It probably included the village of Akhamodot, where the Bill family was said to have lived while working for the Peñas. In 1870, Pancho managed the family property where he lived with his brother and sister-in-law and their six children; Blas Peña, his wife, and their three children lived on the same parcel. Both ethnographic sources and historic documents suggest that many Pomoans continued to live on the Peñas’ property. In 1870 Pancho purchased large quantities of bacon, calico, and muslin, items commonly used to pay native workers. He also paid his bills in part with sacks, which may have been made by native women (10).

It appears that the old rancho system continued until 1870, with Pomoans working for food, clothing, and a place to live, and the rancheros raising cattle and crops on a reduced scale. Traditional entertainment continued as well; the grandson of D.D. Phillips remembered his grandfather’s account of the last Mexican “fandango” held on this property (11). One Pomoan elder described the more mundane activities on the ranch:

Pancho raised cattle. They drove them. He had Indians working for him, had some Spanish people also. They drove them [cattle] to Napa; where they sent them on boats. I don’t know where. Beans, peas, corn, wheat, were raised on Pancho’s ranch. He was well to do... White people drove Pancho and all his men back where they came from (12).

In August of 1870, Frisbee appears to have sold the 200 acres claimed by the Peñas. The Peñas, and presumably their Native American help, left the property. Significantly, it was at about this time that the Pomoan settlement known as Polosha Chunakwani, or “Oak Ball” village, was established (13).

Pomoan elders cannot remember the exact location of Oak Ball. In spite of being a “big village” with “lots of people,” it apparently had neither an assembly house nor a cemetery. The “Indian houses” there were said to have been occupied year round, an innovation no doubt brought about by the usurpation
of the land by settlers, and one that indicates a significant change from the old pattern of seasonal movement. The 1880 census listing for Oak Ball shows 23 individuals in what appear to be two extended family groups, all connected by marriage to the Bill family (see figure in Chapter 8). The men, except for one 70-year-old, worked as laborers, probably on neighboring ranches and farms. By 1880 a few Mihilakawna families had also returned to the Dry Creek Valley and resettled either very near or actually at their old rancheria near the Peña adobe, possibly the ethnographic village of Olowicha (CA-Son-624).

Oak Ball village was reportedly occupied until the 1880s or 1890s. At this time, the resident families of Oak Ball, numbering in excess of 30 individuals, dispersed throughout northern Sonoma County. At least two families moved onto White-owned farms. After leaving Oak Ball village, the Bill and Lucas families moved onto the ranch of Beneval Cordova, a Yaqui Indian from Mexico, who had married Nellie Lucas. Cordova lived with his family in a three-room cabin, while the “old people” had a house nearby. The ranch also had a wooden assembly house and a cemetery. By May of 1910, the Cordova Place had grown to be a community of at least 35 people consisting of the two old Oak Ball families who were living in two multiple-family, three-generation households (14; see figure in Chapter 8).

By the turn of the 20th century, a new settlement pattern was apparently well established among those northern Sonoma County Indians who were not fortunate enough to have the security of a “Cordova Place.” Like the traditional way, the new practice was tied to the changing seasons. Now, however, the quest for employment and the acquisition of a place to live safe from harassment were added to the necessity for food and other materials that were gathered in season. Under the new settlement system, winters were spent in wooden cabins on local ranches. Since paid work would have been scarce at this time of year, it is possible that the “odd jobs” and
“woodchopping” that reportedly occupied the men were done at least partially in exchange for a place to live.

The 1900 enumeration for the area including the Dry Creek uplands lists three Indian families living in “moveable dwellings.” Since the census was taken in June, it is possible that these people were camping while pursuing traditional subsistence practices or temporary agricultural work. In this area, archaeologists found a housepit (CA-Son-588) which may have been built by Native Americans who worked seasonally on the Yordi Ranch. Archaeologists have dated this somewhat non-traditional structure to around the turn of the 20th century. Waste flakes from the manufacture of stone tools and objects of Euroamerican origin, including ceramic tableware, glass bottles and jars, an eyeglass lens, and a slate pencil, were found together in the housepit (15).

In the summer, old people and young children followed the old practice by moving out onto the collecting grounds. There they lived in traditional willow-branch houses while gathering plants, nuts, and berries to support themselves, as well as sometimes hiring out for pay. In her account of this practice, one woman described the hut she and her family occupied as having been made of willow and having two rooms. This is an interesting mixture of traditional Pomoan house construction techniques combined with a Euroamerican divided floor plan, perhaps reflecting the two cultural worlds which these people were spanning. Meanwhile, children over about ten years of age and those adults who could work, spent part of the summer picking hops and fruit for local farmers, shearing sheep, and performing other seasonal labor. In addition to wage work, some Indian families spent time collecting seasonally available plants and nuts, hunting, and fishing. Trips
to the coast for shellfish, surf fish, seaweed, and salt continued to be made at this time of year. The route from Healdsburg passed up Dry Creek Road and west on Rockpile Road. The journey had to be carefully planned so the night could be spent on the land of some sympathetic local rancher. Collecting acorns remained a particularly important activity in the fall. Some sites along Rancheria Creek are known to have been used for this purpose.

Until 1910 many residents of the Cordova Place camped along Rancheria Creek on the ranch of Frank Soule (CA-Son-1211/H). James Shackley, whose wife and children lived at the Cordova Place, worked for Soule clearing brush and timber for pasture, and each year Shackley’s family and other relatives spent time on the Soule Ranch. The men hunted deer and wild hogs, while the women and children collected tan oak acorns and buckeye and pepperwood nuts. In only a week, they collected enough to last the family for a year. Later, Soule harvested the bark from the tan oaks, killing the trees and bringing an end to acorn collecting there (16).

Kashaya Pomo also had camping spots along Rancheria and Warm Springs creeks. From around 1870 until 1919, two Kashaya villages were occupied on the Haupt Ranch west of the Dry Creek-Gualala divide. It is said that Charles Haupt had married a Kashaya woman, and in order to keep her from running away to join her family, he invited them all to live on his property. Like the Dry Creek Pomo from the Cordova Place, the Kashaya from the Haupt Ranch engaged extensively in traditional subsistence practices. Kashaya tribal scholars recalled many sites in the Warm Springs/Rancheria Creek area that had been used by their people in the past, including CA-Son-544/H, or Serene Flat, where there was a large permanent village, and CA-Son-555/H, the Mead Homestead, where people camped while gathering acorns and basketry roots (17).

These resource-gathering practices remained of great value to the cultural as well as the physical survival of local Indians during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. We can speculate that food collected in the summer and fall provided much of the people’s winter subsistence, as it had traditionally. Although this modified seasonal pattern gradually diminished, access to land became more restricted, even in the 1980s some local Indians still engage in the seasonal collection of foodstuffs, ceremonial and medicinal plants, and handcraft materials.

In 1909 Cordova sold his property. The Bill and Lucas families continued to live there until the winter of 1910, when they were forced to leave by the new owner. Having nowhere to go, they sought refuge under a bridge along Dry Creek:

We were thankful for the bridge, it was our roof. People put up blankets to keep the rain and cold out, and put canvas on the ground, so they didn’t have to sit and sleep on the wet ground... We were always cold and seemed like it never dried out under the bridge. All the time hungry, the food ran out... Some good White people took pity on us, they gave us food and said we could stay at their places (18).

Finally in 1915, the federal government purchased land in the Russian River Valley for a rancheria, which the Dry Creek Indian people would share with Indians from Geyerville. Unlike their Dry Creek land, the new reservation had poor soil and was ill supplied with water. In the summer, when the water supply was low and agriculture was impossible, many rancheria residents worked on local ranches. Through the Depression years, the rancheria was well populated; later the population declined when residents began to move away to look for work. In the 1970s, the population began to climb somewhat, perhaps spurred by a declining national economy as well as an upsurge of Native American interest in maintaining traditional culture (19).

New Settlers

Demographic Profile of Settlers: 1860-1910

Demography—the study of the characteristics of human populations, such as size, growth, density, distribution, and vital statistics—is intimately bound up with settlement pattern. Prehistoric studies can do little more than estimate the size of a population, occasionally noting marked fluctuations and linking them to possible causal factors. Much more information is available for the historic period, but ethnic groups were frequently overlooked, and public documents were of little use in the foregoing discussion.

An excellent record is available, however, for the settler population from 1860 to 1910. In the present case, the population is defined as those persons who lived in the Lake Sonoma Area; this area includes only the land purchased by the Corps and not the
downstream area. Using census returns, the number and general cultural background of the people who occupied the area from 1860 until 1910 can be determined, along with the distribution of their age, sex, and occupational characteristics (20).

The Lake Sonoma Area straddles two political townships: Mendocino and Cloverdale. The portions of these townships within the project area differ in their environmental and settlement characteristics. Fluctuations in population were influenced by the differing land uses in the two townships. For this reason, we have created the terms Dry Creek midlands and Dry Creek uplands to refer to the Mendocino Township and Cloverdale Township portions of the Lake Sonoma Area, respectively.

The rich valleys in the Dry Creek midlands were settled before the rugged Dry Creek uplands. The 1860 census is the first one on which these settlers can be identified. The first settlers were predominantly from the Trans-Appalachian Frontier: Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Ohio. Young men and families, initially attracted to California by dreams of gold, settled down to spend the remainder of their days in the area. Constructed from census data, the demographic pyramids depict the age and sex characteristics of the population. The pyramids for 1860 indicate a relatively young population in both areas, with no resident over 50. The frontier character of the 1850s continued, as can be seen by the fact that men outnumber women nearly two to one.

By 1870 the population of the Dry Creek uplands approached that of the midlands, which had nearly doubled since 1860. Growing pioneer families and recent arrivals account for this increase. The Trans-Appalachian Frontier states continued to supply immigrants to the area. In addition, adults from the Northeast, Canada, and northern Europe settled here. The 1870 demographic pyramids are more balanced than those of the previous decade, since they include a few old people and many children under 15. A large proportion (84 percent) of the population under age 20 was born in California. In a marked change from the previous decades, the sex ratio is equal, although there are still slightly more males than females in the marriageable age groups. All of these signs show an increasingly stable resident population.

The population of both areas increased by 50 percent between 1870 and 1880. The demographic pyramids show that the increase in the Dry Creek midlands was due to the arrival of adult male workers, while that in the more recently settled Dry Creek uplands was due to increasing family size, as well as to new arrivals. The difference between the two areas is also reflected in the sex ratio: males outnumbered females in both areas, but more so in the Dry Creek midlands.

Between the early 1870s and the late 1880s, the area experienced what might be termed a florescence, reaching its maximum population and diversification of activities. Both stock raisers and small farmers experimented with different agricultural techniques, while subsistence operators managed to get by and sometimes even to improve their status. The land was
owned (or claimed) and worked by large families, sometimes with the help of kin or hired help.

Immigrants from Ireland, Germany, Switzerland, and Sweden planted vineyards and ran large herds of sheep on their properties. Alexander Skaggs employed natives of China and northern Europe as seasonal help at his resort. Persons of foreign and American birth coexisted as neighbors; in 1880 the number of foreign-born adults (32) approached that of American adults (39). Never again would people of such diverse cultural and national backgrounds reside within the area.

Fueled by a local incident, the Chinese soon became the focal point of racist propaganda. In the early 1880s, many local operators used Chinese workers as a cheap pool of domestic servants, fruitpickers, and woodchoppers. California labor organizations had been working for decades to eliminate this source of cheap competition, when in January 1886, Mr. and Mrs. Wickersham were murdered on their ranch, just a few miles west of Skaggs Springs, allegedly by their Chinese cook. This event received wide and sensational press coverage and provided a rallying point for an anti-Chinese movement that spread throughout the West and drove the Chinese out of numerous communities, to which they never returned. State-wide, anti-Chinese boycotts were organized in both California and Nevada (21). Locally, the Sonoma Democrat (30 January 1886) assailed its readers with three vivid descriptions (each different) of the victims. This must have brought home to many ranchers their isolated and vulnerable position.

Between 1880 and 1900, the population of the Dry Creek midlands increased slightly and remained relatively stable in composition, while that of the Dry Creek uplands declined by nearly two-thirds. The adverse economic and environmental climate of the 1890s put an end to many family enterprises. These conditions were particularly hard felt in the Dry Creek uplands, where two early settler families with large ranches lost their land due to foreclosed mortgages. Many families who practiced subsistence agriculture also left the area, as subsistence-based activities were forced out by the production of cash crops. These families were not replaced by new arrivals; their property was either assimilated into neighboring landholdings or purchased by nonresident investors. In both areas, only a few settler families with their adult children remained.

After the turn of the century, the Dry Creek uplands was characterized by increasingly large sheep and cattle ranches, some of which were run by hired managers. A few poorer families and individuals also remained; these people often worked as seasonal hired help and cooked on the large ranches. The families subsisted on local fish and game during part of the year, raising hogs and taking occasional work outside of the area to supplement their income. In the Dry Creek midlands, the family farms and vineyards continued. Some family members took jobs in town or worked as hired help on neighboring properties, while roadwork supplied some income to residents of both areas. At about the same time, local families began to hire Japanese men to work in the vineyards. The 1910 census also showed a Japanese carpenter working for
a Dry Creek uplands family. Japanese families continued to live in the area until World War II.

By 1910 the population of the Dry Creek midlands had declined somewhat as the pioneer settlers and their children grew old and died or left the area. Few new families moved in to replace them, since the people who remained bought out most of their neighbors. By this time, four generations of some settler families had resided along Dry Creek. (In fact, some of these families and their descendants remained until their land was purchased by the Corps of Engineers in the 1960s and 1970s.) The 1910 demographic pyramid indicates that young families, most of whom were recent arrivals, once again resided in the Dry Creek uplands. The Lake Sonoma Area possessed a relatively homogeneous population: nearly all of the under-twenty age group were California born, while only 8 out of 83 residents were of foreign birth.

**Settlers on the Land**

Federal land policies had a profound influence on settlement within the Lake Sonoma Area, beginning with the squatters’ disputes on the Tzabaco and Sotoyome ranchos, which delayed settlement within the project area. Although some local land grants were quickly confirmed by the U.S. Land Commission in the early 1850s, the legal boundaries and subdivision of both the Tzabaco and Sotoyome ranchos were not fully resolved until much later. Only then were the boundaries between public domain and private property clearly drawn, and squatters either obtained legal title to their claims or moved elsewhere. It was during this period of evictions that settlement increased on the public land within the Lake Sonoma Area.

**Ranch and Farmland**

During the 1860s, settlement focused on two major resources: farmland along accessible creekside terraces, and well-watered grasslands along the ridgetop trail system. It was during this period that most of the eventually successful operators arrived in the area. These settlers faced a problem, in that they held no legal title to their land. Despite ambiguities in the preemption laws, unsurveyed public land could not be purchased and, until 1880, could not be homesteaded from the U.S. Government (22). Arranging for a General Land Office (GLO) survey for government land they wished to claim was therefore one of the settlers’ first concerns. Prospective landowners were required to pay for the survey of public land that they planned to acquire. The GLO had a constant backlog of areas waiting to be surveyed, and did not begin work in the project area until 1872, by which time the area was already well populated. As detailed in the chapter on landholding, settlers had spread throughout the area and staked possessor claims to large tracts of land. These people usually purchased or homesteaded the most desirable portions of their original holdings as soon as the land was surveyed, gradually converting additional areas of their possessor claims to legal holdings.

A number of trends are apparent in the creation of local ranches. The most obvious is the advantage held by the first settlers in the area, who were able to secure the best land. By settling prior to the official
“opening” for sale of public lands, they were also allowed a period of experimentation with the environment without the need for capital outlay on land. Thus, viable ranch units could be established by the time the land was available for purchase. The next problem for these first ranchers was establishing legal claim and preventing the access of other settlers to their holdings (23; see also Chapter 5, this volume).

Some landholding strategies can be inferred from the relationship between an individual’s holdings, natural features, and the relative position of others’ land. Access to water was of vital importance in land acquisition. This need was met either by obtaining an entire stretch of creek frontage contiguous to the owner’s original patented holdings, or by getting a single parcel with water frontage which was a short distance (less than one-half mile) from the major holding, with government land between the two. By the latter method, access to the scarce resource was assured with minimal capital outlay.

These practices, and their advantage to the rancher, did not go unnoticed by government officials. Writing of the North Coast Ranges in 1886, one official complained:

There are ranges covering thousands of acres which are controlled (not owned) by sheepmen, their holdings simply covering the strategic points of the range, possession of the water sources generally sufficing in itself to attain the desired end. Holding these points, the balance of the range is of no value to anyone else, and his herds range undisturbed over public lands. These lands are effectually excluded from settlement, the county and State governments deprived of legitimate sources of revenue, and at the same time valuable public property rapidly going to waste (24).

Although a considerable amount of land was still open for settlement in 1890, it was of little worth, for land had value only in relation to other resources, such as water, roads, and prime grazing areas, which had already been claimed. In the Lake Sonoma Area, the agricultural bottomland had been claimed by the early 1860s. The closing of the range is more difficult to pinpoint, but certainly by 1870 rangeland was no longer freely available to all comers. Access to town markets and transportation routes was another factor in settlement; rangelands near Cloverdale and along easily traveled trails were claimed before land in more remote areas (25).

Land purchases from the government declined in the 1890s, probably as a result of an 1891 federal law which repealed various public-land policies in an effort to discourage speculation. Patenting increased following the turn of the century, due to more changes in government land policies and the consolidation within the study area of many small parcels into a few large ones. Before this time, public land had often formed the boundaries between ranches. When these ranches were consolidated, the presence of public land within the holding threatened efficient management, for it could, at least in theory, be purchased by others. Thus the purchase of public and private land often coincided (26).
The accumulation of land in 40-acre parcels resulted in a checkerboard pattern of landholdings, for not all parcels were equally desirable. Consolidated by a real-estate investor in 1901, Baldwin’s Surrey Ranch was irregular in shape and followed section or quarter-section lines for its boundary, which was 34 miles “in an air hue.” Baldwin described the pattern and its formation as follows:

In the early days the land had been homesteaded or bought with a view to grass and to leave out as much as possible waste brush land. Later seven small ranches had been bought up and made into one larger holding. This accounted for the irregular shape, but though it required more fencing, it was all in one body and took in much less waste land than if it had been somewhat more uniform in shape (27).

Changes to the 1862 Homestead Act may have accounted for the increase in homestead applications filed after 1912. In that year, the Enlarged Homestead Act was extended to California; it doubled the acreage, from 160 to 320, that could be homesteaded by an individual. The Three-Year Homestead Act, also of 1912, reduced the mandatory period of residence required of homesteaders; in addition, only seven months of every year had to be spent on the land to qualify. The Stock-Raising Homestead Act of 1916 further recognized conditions in the West by allowing 640-acre homesteads to be filed on land designated suitable for grazing. Landowners used this new law to acquire small, previously passed over parcels and a few larger pieces from the dwindling inventory of federal land. In 1934 the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act withdrew from private entry the country’s remaining 165,965,000 acres of public domain. Although small parcels within the study area were purchased from the government after this date, public land was no longer so easy to obtain.

**Skaggs Springs**

Most settlers in the area staked their claims to acreage matching their perceptions of the best available farming, grazing, or timber lands. But the area had another valuable resource—mineral springs—and these were probably the most hotly contested properties in the area.

The hardships of the California passage and of the Gold Rush impaired the health of many Californians. The promise of health-giving springs had great attraction for those who, while making a fortune, may have lost their vitality. Miners were quickly joined by a multitude of health seekers, as spas became a haven for those temporarily fleeing unhealthy conditions elsewhere. These “watering places” were extremely valuable properties and, in the days before legal title, the object of considerable feuding and local disputes between would-be owners. In the Dry Creek uplands, neighbors fought over both Hood’s Hot Springs and Matthews’ Soda Springs, while the larger and more accessible Skaggs Hot Springs was probably the first parcel of public land claimed and permanently settled within the Warm Springs area. It was also the focus of land disputes for nearly 20 years (28).
In 1856 Alexander Skaggs located what would become Skaggs Hot Springs resort. The spot became well known for its “picturesque and salubrious” location, “surrounded by many huge mountains covered with rich California verdure” (29). The springs were located in the winding canyon of Warm Springs (at one time called Hot Springs) Creek, “a rock-fretted stream, whose dark waters nestle closely under the tall cliffs, which shut out the sunlight, except for a few hours at mid-day” (30). Although there was some flat pasture land, most of the land encircling the springs was rugged and flanked by giant redwoods, rocky canyons, rushing creeks, and small waterfalls.

Tax records indicate that by 1857, Alexander and his brother William had built some structures at the springs. Neither brother apparently lived there all year, for as late as 1862 they were squatting on the Rancho Sotyoyme. William Skaggs was taxed for a license on an “8th Class Hotel” the following year. Over the next few years he made improvements and raised the status of the place to a “4th Class Hotel,” with a pianoforte and a retail liquor license. The Skaggeses, of course, did not have clear title to this valuable property but maintained their hold through a possessory right. In 1865 and 1867, Alexander Skaggs paid county taxes on the improvements on his 160-acre claim. His investment in improvements was considerably higher than that of nearby farmers: in 1870, for example, James Pritchett’s 160-acre claim and improvements were assessed at $500, while the 160-acre claim and improvements of Alexander Skaggs were valued at $3000.

Skaggs’ claim was particularly vulnerable because he did not reside on it, but leased the hotel to others. His last and most costly dispute was with
Perry Emerson. During 1872 and 1873, Skaggs had leased the resort to Emerson, who, according to Skaggs, attempted to jump the claim. Following a few arguments and fist fights, Skaggs took Emerson to court for not running the hotel properly and for nonpayment of rent. Skaggs won and Emerson was ordered to vacate the resort. But just three days before Emerson was due to leave, the hotel mysteriously burned to the ground, and Skaggs had Perry Emerson and his friends arrested for arson. The charges were dismissed, but one of the accused, upset by the bad publicity, sued Skaggs for $10,000 in damages. During the trial, Skaggs accused Emerson and his crowd of threatening him, his family, and his property; mutilating his livestock and dogs, tearing down his fences, stealing his property, scaring away the hotel guests with rowdy behavior, and, ultimately, of claim jumping and burning down the hotel. Emerson and his friends denied all Skaggs’ accusations and blamed the fire on a faulty metal chimney on the parlor stove. Skaggs lost the case and had to pay $1000 plus court costs (31). He did, however, keep possession of the property and went on to rebuild the hotel.

It was not by accident that the dispute of Emerson and Skaggs coincided with the GLO surveys in the area. In 1873, the year of the survey’s completion, Skaggs’ 160-acre possessor right was valued at a whopping $5000 and his improvements at $10,000—all this on land that could be purchased from the government for $400. At that time, Skaggs’ tax assessment listing noted “title not good,” indicating his precarious position. By 1876, however, Skaggs had acquired legal title to 440 acres, including, of course, the then-famous hot springs. Over the years, Alexander added to his legal holdings, and by his death in 1897, the Skaggs Ranch contained 1182 acres.

Fences and Boundaries on the Land

In the 19th century, property boundaries in the Lake Sonoma Area were not usually fenced; fences were used only around fields, gardens, and orchards. Ranch boundaries in the days of possessor claims were inexact defined by those of neighboring ranches: Ferry’s claim, for example, was said to end where Sylvester Scott’s began. Ridgetops, creeks, and other prominent natural features defined the boundaries of many ranches prior to government survey. On this land, livestock—hogs, cattle, and sheep—were allowed to roam free and frequently strayed onto neighboring claims, where they grazed at no expense to their owner. In the early days, when livestock were not usually well tended, knowledge of the animals’ whereabouts was only necessary during birthing seasons or when it was time for sale or shearing. Strays might remain at a neighbor’s until such time as the owner decided to look for them or the host landowner came upon a lost animal and asked its owner to retrieve it. It is possible that before the legal purchase of large tracts of public land, holders of large and small claims were able to coexist, the livestock of the small homesteaders being allowed to range over the acreage of the large possessor’s claims. As the number of people and animals increased, so did competition for grazing land. The acreage limitation on free government land and the erection of fences on large properties forced small landholders to subsist on their own acreage, which often proved to be inadequate.

Before about 1900, only hotly contested boundaries would have been fenced. These fences, being the source and symbol of the feud, were often moved, removed, and vandalized. It was not until after the establishment of legal title that fencing became the cooperative goal of neighbors. Even then, friction as to the fence’s location, cost, labor, and construction was common, as suspicious neighbors strove to outsmart each other.

One reason for the squabbles over fence construction was that, to quote Baldwin, “fencing was tough work.” Baldwin described the labor involved:

First a redwood tree had to be selected, cut down, sawed into lengths and split into posts. Then came the grueling work of sledding the posts onto the line or as was often the case where the ground was so steep and rugged, we would pack them onto a mule ten or twelve to the load and dump them off in piles. While still a little green these posts weighed from twenty-five to forty pounds each.

The heavy rolls of wire mesh, twenty rods to the roll and weighing one hundred and sixty pounds, were another problem, both to pack on the mules to the line and to roll out and stretch on uneven ground (32).

Baldwin spoke with authority, for during his tenure at Surrey Ranch he built over 40 miles of fencing. He fenced not only his boundaries but built cross-fencing as well. Cross-fencing became an effective range-management tool. To prevent erosion
and improve pasture, Baldwin erected a total of about 15 miles of cross-fences, subdividing his pastures so that the sheep would not trample as much ground as formerly, and some feed might be conserved for winter. He found that “this method improved my range year after year, whereas up to that time, it had deteriorated rapidly” (33). Over the years, more and more fences were built in the Lake Sonoma Area. Presently, stake fences are an outstanding feature on the landscape. They snake impressively up and over the peaks of ridges, testifying to their importance and the incredibly laborious work of constructing them.

Fencing remained an issue even after the government had purchased 17,000 acres of land for the Warm Springs Dam-Lake Sonoma project. Stray animals were difficult to round up and at times were rustled by outsiders. Corps of Engineers staff complained about damage done by stray livestock, while ranchers complained that the Corps did not fence its boundary. Some ranchers did enclose their properties, and the Corps developed plans for 46 miles of fencing.

The Built Environment

Many elements of local settlement pattern may be gleaned from the inventory of known historic sites, which was compiled from field notes of the prehistoric survey crew and from spot-checks based on these notes, as well as on leads from old maps, written records, and oral-history accounts. Archaeologists located 78 historic sites in the field (34). These included modern agricultural features, a 1920s hunting club complex, the Cherry Creek School, 19th-century stone dugouts, sheds, house foundations, numerous bridges, and a garage. Historical research focused on families and individuals connected with the most significant of these sites.

The James Pritchett, Tennessee Bishop, and William Board families were among the first settlers in the area, claiming farmland by 1856 within about one mile of each other on Dry Creek near its confluence with Warm Springs Creek. Within ten years, other families had made claim to grazing land on the broad and relatively flat ridgetops overlooking Dry Creek. In contrast, the remote canyons and ridgelands, particularly along Rancheria Creek, were settled and occupied by single men who engaged in hunting, trapping, logging, mining, and subsistence agriculture (35). This pattern continued into the 20th century.

The first map references to settlement within the Lake Sonoma Area as a whole are found on Bowers’ Official Farm Map of Sonoma County, which was compiled around 1863. Bowers recorded the
whereabouts of a number of area families, including the Sylvester Scotts, the Pritchets, and the Richards, and of two camps—Grouse and Hardscrabble—just to the west.

Farm or ranch headquarters were built near arable land next to creeks, with only a short private approach from main wagon roads. Wagon roads often followed ridgetops, as did some of the Indian trails that preceded them. In addition to retracing these routes, Euroamericans often built their dwellings and planted their crops on what had been Native American settlements. The soil of Indian middens was widely acclaimed to be the best medium for growing crops, and settlers looked for evidence of this former occupation when choosing a home site. Not surprisingly, more than 20 of the archaeological sites recorded in the Lake Sonoma Area had been used in both prehistoric and historic times.

As can be seen on Thompson’s 1877 map, the Richards, Pritchett, Hallengren, and Van Alen families, with landholdings along Dry Creek, lived on the road “to Healdsburg;” the Beatty, Cooper, and Abshire families lived along the “Cloverdale Road”—the Beattys on Beatty (later Yorty) Creek, the Coopers at the confluence of Dry Creek and Cherry Creek, and the Abshires further along Dry Creek. The Sylvester Scott family lived on a side road on a fertile hillside above Dry Creek, while the John Ferry family, who are not shown, lived further west on the Cloverdale Road along Dry Creek. Thompson’s map does not show all the persons who lived in the area in 1877. In fact, the Dry Creek uplands around Ferry and Scott was fairly populous and was referred to as the “Upper Dry Creek Settlement” by GLO surveyors in the 1870s. From the 1880s to at least late 1900, mail to persons in the area could be addressed “Drie (or Dry) Creek, Cloverdale.” The Mendocino District School, discussed below, probably provided the focal point for this settlement. Proximity to schools, to other family members, and to neighbors was an important factor in the location of dwellings (36).

Ranches and farmsteads often took on the appearance of little settlements. Baldwin described his ranch headquarters as he found it in 1903:

It really wasn’t so bad except for the bare hill on which the house stood. There was a pleasant two story house [former Sylvester Scott residence] about two hundred yards to the north for the foreman, a one story cottage for hired help, wagon sheds, a tool house and blacksmith shop and two barns (37).

During his stay, Baldwin made many improvements and additions to his ranchstead; these went beyond the normal embellishments for the time, including an aviary, a swimming hole, and a pond for “Quip,” the oddest member of their menagerie, an alligator.

Baldwin had the time and resources to create these whimsical and nonessential additions, for his ranch was an operating venture when he arrived. Pioneer settlers did not have this luxury. Within a very short time, they had to build a house for shelter and plant crops for food. As such, the first house was often small and not intended to be permanent. When time and money allowed, families often enlarged their dwellings or built new ones, turning the old house over to the ranch hands or converting it into an outbuilding. Many of the first houses built in the area were probably what have been described as folk houses. These houses were built without formal plans according to the image of the completed house that existed in the mind of the builder, whose unconscious decisions about size, proportion, and layout were based on his previous experience. The house of James and Elizabeth Pritchett (CA-Son-1129/H), built in 1862, was probably such a structure (see Chapter 3).

When families rebuilt, they often chose more contemporary styles based on formal plans. When the Pritchett’s son fashioned his home just after the turn of the century, he picked a floor plan that was apparently Colonial Revival in style. By this time, numerous books and magazines advised farmers and ranchers on every subject imaginable, including building country homes. Based on her reading of an article in Circle Magazine, one young lady offered an experienced Dry Creek uplands rancher the following advice on his anticipated new home:

When you build your house that you were thinking of be sure and have a cement cellar—that will do away with the dairy and give you more ground for your house—the cellar is much better for storage purposes and you can keep meat in it for a very long time in the Summer as well as Winter (38).

After building a home and putting in crops, the pioneer settler often planted trees, both fruit and ornamental. Certain trees, like the presence of Indian midden, were seen as indicators of good soil.
Eighteenth-century lore foretold that chestnut, hickory, walnut, oak, cherry, and elm signaled areas suitable for farming. In the 19th century, Americans prized land covered with hickory and walnut, for, according to historian John Stilgoe,

such species represented dignity, strength and courage, characteristics that won for Andrew Jackson the nickname “Old Hickory,” and they epitomized national standards of arboreal beauty. Always, however, they first indicated soil rich enough to farm (39).

The pioneer settlers planted both hickory and walnut trees, along with many varieties of fruit trees, and a few exotic ornamental species. Eucalyptus were popular in the 1870s, as the tree was believed to be a deterrent to air and water-borne diseases, and to harmful insect pests; many eucalyptus were planted in the project area at that time.

**John Ferry Homestead**

Ranchstead layout can be partially reconstructed for the John Ferry homestead (CA-Son-567/H), which was the focus of archaeological investigations under the direction of Roberta Greenwood (40). This site is located in the rugged northern section of the study area, in an area of mixed woodland-grassland, on one of the best broad, open terraces in the Dry Creek uplands. An Indian midden, which was called “Homestead Pasture” by the archaeological survey crew who first recorded it, was also located on the site.

The dwelling of the John Ferry family was probably built in 1870, when the Ferrys purchased their ranch on Dry Creek. The house, located at the highest point along the creek within their acreage, would have possessed a fine view up and down the narrow creek gorge. A former resident provided a sketch of the house as he remembered it before it was destroyed in 1948. The house had five rooms—two bedrooms, kitchen, living room, and dining room—and large front and back porches. The kitchen had a
view of the Ferry’s private drive, the sheep shed and pens, and the bridge across the creek. The structure, probably built of hand-hewn redwood on a foundation of local stone, was symmetrical in floor plan and small for the dozen people it once housed.

Although John Ferry was a rancher—first cattle and later sheep—he also tilled the earth. The Ferrys planted an orchard northwest of the house, on a narrow stream terrace. At one time this orchard probably covered from five to seven acres, but by 1983, when Warm Springs Dam was finished, the terrace on which the trees were planted was eroding into Dry Creek. A number of trees survived and bore fruit, including a magnificent old green-apple tree, a white-fruited fig with a spread of 45 feet, several prune trees, Bartlett and Winter Nellis pears, and two quince trees. A clearly discernible vineyard tillage pattern, possibly the remains of the one first planted by John Ferry, remained up the hill from the house on the southwest-facing slope of a gentle hillside.

John Ferry’s fields were once partially surrounded by cottonwood trees. He probably planted the row of black walnut trees that survived near the former house site. A short distance from the house was a large, flat, fertile field, where Ferry may have grown the one acre of potatoes listed in the 1880 agricultural census. Spring bulbs, whose progenitors may have been planted by the Ferrys, still flowered on their homestead site. These hearty varieties, well suited to the local climate, included purple and white iris and the polyanthus narcissus (41).

Well-designed outbuildings were an important part of any agricultural enterprise. Designing a shearing shed, for example, was not as simple as it might sound. For, according to a study-area rancher,

The Lake Sonoma Area, in the 1870s (from Thompson’s Historical Atlas Map of Sonoma County, 1877)
you had to have the right flow of traffic of the animals for the maximum efficiency and had to have the corral in the right place and the gates in the right place and opening in the right way. There was more to it than just putting in pickets (42).

A sheep shed and corrals recorded by archaeologists on the John Ferry homestead seem to meet these criteria. The sheep were evidently gathered outside in holding pens at one end of the shed, from which they were herded into a run on the side of the building. The sheep run had a dodge gate that opened into the middle of the shed. From here the animals were directed into one of the five partitioned shearing stations. After shearing, the sheep were placed in a holding area before being run up a chute and loaded into a waiting truck. The sheared wool was taken up into the loft, where it was pressed into wool bags and slid down fleece chutes onto the floor below for storage (43).

The shed, recorded in 1980, was probably constructed many years after Ferry’s tenure. Those actually built by the 19th-century rancher had long since disappeared and could not attest to his skill and efficiency. But by all indications, including the few remains of his homestead, Ferry was a thoughtful and innovative rancher. His acquaintances certainly did not anticipate that he would be unable to weather his financial problems; but Ferry fell victim to the overly optimistic expansions of the 1880s (more about the Ferrys can be found in chapters 5 and 8).

Schools

Soon after settling the land, young families began to think of schools. A school distinguished the true settlement—the one that was meant to stay—from haphazard, transient occupation. Residents of the upper Dry Creek Valley had already built a schoolhouse when, in 1866, the Sonoma County Superintendent of Schools appointed an Upper Dry Creek District Board of Trustees. After hiring a teacher and repairing the schoolhouse, the trustees organized the first district election, in which William Board, J.D. Wood, and A. Blair were elected as school trustees. The first official act of these men was to change the name of the district to Hamilton.

The first Hamilton School was on private property. In 1870 the trustees voted to obtain a school lot and made plans for a new building. They purchased three acres of land from J.D. Wood adjoining the Richards property, just east of the present-day Warm Springs Dam. While settlers wanted schools, they were not always willing to finance them; over the next four years, the voters of the district turned down three tax measures to build the new schoolhouse. Following the third defeat, and “after considering counsel and some spirited discussion,” the board of trustees decided to build the schoolhouse anyway (44). In a little over two months, the new Hamilton School was finished, except for some interior painting and woodwork.

Mr. Kraft, who taught at the Hamilton School in the fall of 1879, described the schoolhouse in his monthly newspaper report:

The schoolhouse is located in the Dry Creek Valley in a beautiful grove, and is surrounded
by a large and shady fir, oak and madrona trees, and the play ground is almost unlimited. The building is a substantial frame twenty-four by thirty-six feet, well painted and the interior is hard-finished. It contains patent desks, 152 surface feet of good blackboard, a valuable library, globe, charts, a good stove, a whole chair and desk, and all other necessaries and is a credit to the district (45).

The location of schools and school districts depended upon the enrollment of a requisite minimum number of pupils. A school district could be formed if enough children resided in an area at too great a distance from any other school. In the Dry Creek uplands, there were at least three school buildings over the years. The presence of large families in the uplands resulted in the creation, in 1871, of the Mendocino School near the Ferrys’ house. During the first year, 57 students attended the school; three years later, attendance peaked at 65 pupils. Two decades later, the Cherry Creek District School (CA-Son-552H) was formed in 1893, with the children of Tom and Margret Scott making up a large share of the quota of students. When the Scott family moved in 1901, enrollment fell, and the Cherry Creek School District merged with Mendocino. Some districts contained more than one school to accommodate the needs of all of its pupils. From 1875, the Hamilton District sometimes employed a teacher for a school above Skaggs Springs, “as the children in that part of the District could reap no advantages from the school on the creek” (46).

During its existence, the Hamilton School never lacked students within walking distance. Although families were smaller in the valley, there were more of them, and the second generation often stayed on the family farm and raised children of their own. But the Mendocino School served a declining population spread over a wide area, and the location of the school changed many times over the years to accommodate the needs of the greatest number of pupils. In some school districts, the building itself was physically dismantled and reassembled on a more convenient site. In others, as in the Mendocino District, it was simply the students who were shifted between various buildings, which were only sometimes used as schools. In the 1870s, the Mendocino School was located within reach of the Ferrys’ children, the children of the Sylvester Scotts, and of other homesteaders within a five-mile radius. Five miles can be a long journey over rugged terrain; many children traveled long distances on horseback, often leaving home before daybreak to reach school. In
1908 the school was temporarily housed at the Baldwins’:

The school district was using the little cottage in our group of buildings that year because it evened up the distance that the different families had to go to get to school, and because the school teacher, Farley Auble, a fine young man to whom the children were devoted, boarded with the Smalleys (47).

As population in the Lake Sonoma Area declined, the age of the residents increased, since few young families replaced the older settlers. The Mendocino District School operated with just a few children until it finally closed in 1936. At that point the building was used as a woodchopper’s cabin, until it burned down some years later. Only 15 students attended Hamilton School in 1920, and not long thereafter, the school closed.

**Skaggs Springs**

Unlike the agricultural properties, which were laid out in such a way as to make efficient and productive use of all available resources, the buildings and landscaping at Skaggs Springs were constructed with a view to promoting a different resource: using the natural setting to create a sense of relaxation and peace. Visitors came to the springs for health and leisure. They bathed in the soothing spring water and hiked throughout the surrounding countryside. In the early days, the men went on hunting excursions with a renowned hunter, while in later years, trout fishing became a main attraction.

Before the 1873 fire, the Skaggs Springs Hotel had a bar room, about 24 bedrooms, a kitchen, a private dining room, a main dining room, a parlor, and a cellar. Other buildings and improvements on the resort included five or six guest cottages and a bathhouse, as well as a hog pen, barn, corral, garden, and orchard. Skaggs rebuilt within a year of the fire. In 1897, when he died, the hotel had 17 guest rooms, a barbershop, bar, parlor, private and main dining rooms, and many other service-related rooms. The hotel was fronted by a brick patio on the east and a covered dining area on the south. There were also 11 cottages for guests and employees, with from 2 to 16 rooms each. The guest cottages were named after the localities from which Skaggs’ guests came—Nob Hill,
Oakland, San Rafael—in order that they might feel more at home. According to one report, the resort had a total of 76 guest rooms.

Not all vacationers slept in cottages or in the hotel. Perhaps as early as the 1870s, Skaggs added tent platforms: structures with a wooden floor and canvas-covered upper frame. Prior to this improvement, some guests may have brought their own camping equipment or simply slept under the stars. By 1920 there were five clusters of tent platforms on the resort grounds.

The bathhouse complex was on the west side of Little Warm Springs Creek. There were a dozen bathhouses in two rows facing each other, one for men and one for women. The cast-iron tubs that they contained were filled with hot spring water. Hot baths were often followed by a stint in the nearby massage room. The three hot springs and one “cold soda and iron spring” were the main attraction at Skaggs’. Each of the hot springs had gazebos or other shelters built over them. Benches lined the gazebo walls, and there was a small pool of spring water in the center.

Guests used the metal dippers that hung from the walls to take water from the pools to drink (48).

The hotel and main recreational facilities were located along what was, after 1890, Stewart’s Point-Skaggs Spring Road, at its intersection with the resort’s unimproved, dirt road. A short distance from the dirt road, interspersed along Little Warm Springs Creek, were the cottages and tent platforms. The bathhouse and covered springs were located further along the creek, away from the main road and the hotel. A few cottages, including Exile Cottage, so named for its location furthest from the center of resort activity, were sited in quiet wooded areas along the dirt road past the springs. Thus, a guest could choose to socialize in the popular areas around the hotel, or to seek solitude in a relatively isolated cottage or in walks through the countryside.

Seasonality

The Lake Sonoma Area has basically two seasons: it is wet from November through April, and dry for most of May through October. Throughout the area, travel was difficult—at times impossible—for much of the rainy season. Because of this isolation, many
economic and most social activities slowed during the winter. Through the early 20th century, even the Mendocino District School, located in the uplands, closed just before Thanksgiving and reopened in April. The structures at Skaggs were not the only ones in the study area to be seasonally occupied; many other dwellings and outbuildings saw use only during the dry season.

Skaggs Springs is an extreme example of the seasonal aspects of the local settlement pattern. During the height of the summer, it was not uncommon for 300 guests to stay at the resort. The hotel, cottages, tent platforms, and campers’ tents were full. People roamed over the surrounding hills, fishing, hunting, and picking berries; they swam in the creeks, soaked in the baths, and danced in the open-air ballroom. By fall, only a few persons were left; the resort was wet, cold, and quiet.

After applying for homestead patents in various parts of the Lake Sonoma Area, some families used their homestead cabins as summer homes or hunting bases. This pattern began in the 1890s and continued well into the 20th century. During the dry season, family and friends would take both short and extended holidays on the property, while a neighbor, perhaps in exchange for a discount on grazing rights, might caretake the property the rest of the year. During parts of the 20th century, hunting rights probably equaled grazing rights in value. The Hot Springs Ranch Corporation, which purchased large tracts including John Ferry’s homestead and part of Baldwin’s Surrey Ranch in 1931, was organized as a joint hunting club and sheepraising operation. The population on this property would have fluctuated greatly, with a large crowd during hunting season, extra workers at sheep-shearing time, and only the tenant ranchers and their help for the rest of the year.

Up until the 1920s, the bark of the tan oak, used in processing leather, was another resource that brought people temporarily into the area. The bark peeling season ran from mid-May to mid-August, although it was best to wait until the latter part of the season. The bark took about three weeks to dry prior to shipment. During this time, it was very important to keep the bark dry, and storage shelters were often constructed (49). Some landholders in the Lake Sonoma Area no doubt sold their timber rights to a contractor, who would bring in his own crew to accomplish the harvest. In this case, the only specially built structures would have been the overhang to protect the tanbark and a cookhouse, for barkpeelers commonly slept outdoors.

Temporary logging and mining camps may also once have existed within the study area. Surface remains of these activities have probably washed away long ago from the creekside terraces that would have been the most comfortable camping places.

**Conclusion**

After the completion of the Warm Springs Dam, only the fish-hatchery staff lived in the project area. But the area was not always characterized by this emptiness. For thousands of years, people made this their home, occupying permanent villages and seasonal campsites. The pressure of Euroamerican settlement changed the size and location of native settlements, but Pomoan Indians continued as a part of the region’s population. The 1870s saw the Lake Sonoma Area burgeoning with people and activities. The large families kept numerous schools in the area simultaneously in session. Settlers socialized with their neighbors, with residents of nearby towns, and with friends and relatives from further afield. This bustle of activities and the families who, for a time, thrived on it had been nearly forgotten when the Warm Springs Cultural Resources Study began its investigations of the area and are the subject of the following chapters.
Makahmo mother and infant, 1899; Elsie Allen carried by her mother, Annie Burke
(photo courtesy of Elsie Allen)