

# People of the Earth

## Life and Culture of the Tongva



February 9th to May 5th, 2018  
310-395-2290 | [www.santamonicahistory.org](http://www.santamonicahistory.org)

## Greetings

---



*I am delighted to welcome you to our newest exhibit, which explores the history and cultural influence of the Tongva Gabrielino. I am proud that this exhibit reflects and embodies our ongoing commitment to fulfilling the mission set forth by my mother and museum co-founder, Louise B. Gabriel. Keeping history alive was always foremost in her work, and she never missed an opportunity to highlight our city's rich cultural heritage.*

*When gathering items in the museum's early days, she made sure to secure artifacts representing Santa Monica's indigenous population.*

*The Tongva continue to play an active role in our community by helping to establish Tongva Park, in preserving Kuruvungna Springs at University High School, and by partnering with UCLA to create the Mapping Indigenous LA project. A special thank you to the Gabrielino Tongva Springs Foundation for helping make this exhibit possible.*

*I hope you will join me in welcoming an exhibit that explores the lives of our earliest residents.*

*Thank you for joining us.*

*Susan Gabriel Potter*

Susan Gabriel Potter, President  
**Santa Monica History Museum**





## A Brief History...

---

The Tongva inhabited what is now Los Angeles County, northern Orange County, parts of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and the four southern Channel Islands (San Nicolas, San Clemente, Santa Barbara, and Santa Catalina Islands). The Los Angeles River supported one of the highest concentrations of native people in the U.S.—approximately two dozen villages.

Instead of having a larger tribal identity, precontact Tongva lived in villages composed of lineages of extended families. Each village had its own name, and *Tongva* is used by community members to refer to themselves. The Tongva are also known as the Gabrieleño (or Gabrielino), which comes from their association with the San Gabriel Mission built within their territory. Many contemporary place names, such as *Tujunga*, *Cahuenga*, *Topanga*, and *Moomat Ahiko Way* in Santa Monica, derive from Tongva.

Abalone shell (Courtesy Angie Dorame Behrns)

Cover: Onion brush, Wood spear, Pine needle basket (Courtesy Julia Bogany)

---

The trails that connected Tongva villages for communication and trade became well-worn footpaths, and some were adapted for railroads and paved roads. Wilshire Boulevard is an example of one such route. Not only have shell beads been found as far north as Oregon, local shells and soapstone have been identified among the Pueblo Indians of New Mexico.

Far from being a wilderness, precontact California was an ecosystem carefully managed by indigenous communities. This involved intensive horticulture, from planting and watering to pruning and spreading seeds across the landscape. Three primary rivers and a series of wetlands nourished the Los Angeles Basin. Stories were used to pass along history and to teach reciprocal interaction with the landscape.

**“Our paddlers are very much like our honored warriors of the ocean, hunters-gatherers of the sea. They bring the gift of life from the sea and communication, trade that is so essential to a vibrant society.” –Julia Bogany (Tongva), Gabrielino Tongva Springs Foundation president**

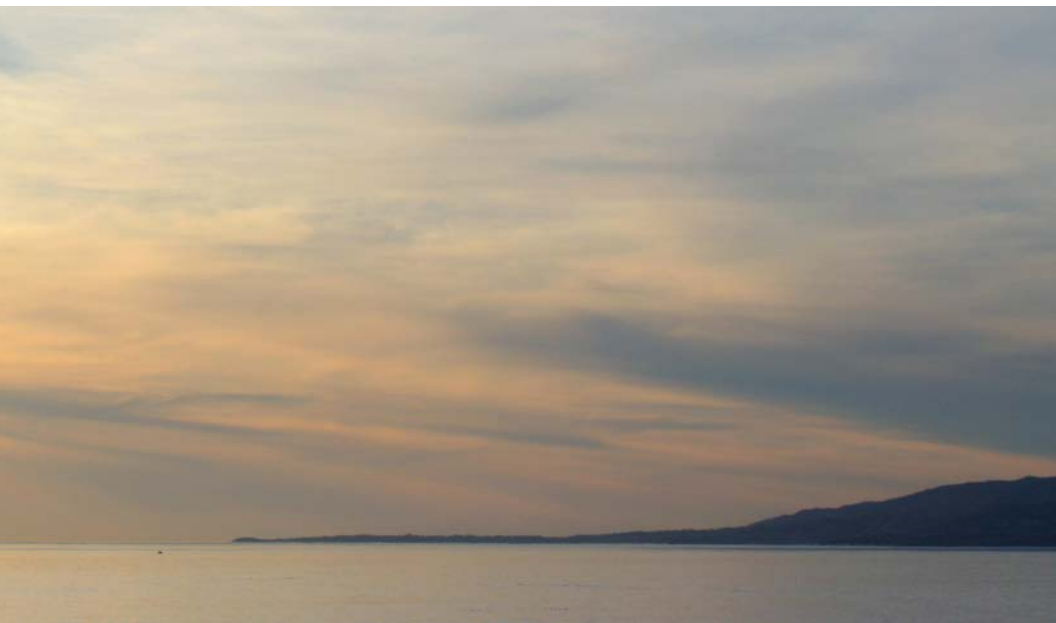


---

Precontact Tongva were a hunter-gatherer society, with much of their success attributed to a stable and sophisticated social structure. Though community identity varied significantly from village to village, interaction was common, resulting in intermarriage and political alliances. Santa Monica Bay served as an abundant source of food. *Ti'at* canoes constructed from pitch-sealed redwood planks were used for fishing and transport to local islands.



**"Our cultural identity has been derived from the landscape and everything on it. Plants are to be treated with reciprocal respect as relatives in the web of nature, in the circle of life." –Craig Torres (Tongva), Tongva Educator**





“As time went on, we needed to blend in with the other ethnic groups in Los Angeles and become part of their societies. We were thought of as the lowest people.” –Anthony Morales (Chief Red Blood, Tongva), Tribal Chairman

European contact had a severe impact on indigenous people. Historians categorize contact between indigenous people and the United States as the “most fundamental contact in human history.” In 1769, Spain began establishing missions in California to defend their possession of the land and relied on the forced labor of California’s indigenous population.

The Gold Rush led to an influx of American settlers who saw indigenous peoples as a nuisance and threat to their territorial occupation.

In 1994, the State of California acknowledged the Tongva nation “as the aboriginal tribe of the Los Angeles Basin and takes great pride in recognizing the Indian inhabitation of the Los Angeles Basin and the continued existence of the Indian community.” The Tongva still do not have federal recognition.



Carleton Watkins “Indian Huts - San Gabriel” c1877 (Courtesy Philip D. Nathanson Collection)  
 Tongva villages map, created by Sutimiv-Pa’alat (Courtesy Julia Bogany)

---

Federal recognition is a complex process requiring native people to prove identity to a group which for so long the US government tried to destroy.

Today, *e'kwa'shem* (we are still here) is a beloved Tongva phrase. Our state boasts more native residents than any other and Los Angeles has the second-highest indigenous population of any city. In 2017, Los Angeles voted to replace Columbus Day with Indigenous Peoples Day as a way of reconciling a painful past and acknowledging the importance of the first Americans.

As all cultures do, the Tongva evolve—practicing native ways while also embracing new ones. They are founding native-inspired businesses, earning PhDs at UCLA, and regaining what was lost. In addition, they are working with cultural institutions to teach others about their people.



Kuruvungna Springs at University High School, Toypurina mural in Ramona Gardens (both SMHM)

---

## Acknowledgment

Following indigenous protocols of recognizing the original inhabitants of Los Angeles, we would like to acknowledge the Tongva on whose lands we live as we present this exhibit. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work with the *taraaxotam* (indigenous peoples) in this place. We pay our respects to *Honuukvetam* (Ancestors), elders, and *'Eyoohiinkem* (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

# Thank you for making this exhibit possible!

---

Dalphina Basile  
Angie Dorame Behrns  
Julia Bogany  
Lauren Bon  
Jen Curtis  
Kayte Deioma  
David Dies  
Mercedes Dorame  
River Garza  
Roger Genser  
Michael J. Hart  
Votan Henriquez  
Stevy Hernandez

Dino Labiste  
Willie Littlejohn  
Julie Lorenzen  
Desiree Martinez  
Anthony Morales  
Marlena Myles  
Philip D. Nathanson  
Carol Reznichek  
Theresa Richau  
Paulina Sahagun  
Angela Sanchez  
Wendy Teeter  
Craig Torres

---

**Thank you to our museum members!**  
**Your support powers the museum.**

Learn more by visiting: [www.santamonicahistory.org](http://www.santamonicahistory.org)

---