

## The Tule River Indian War of 1856

An influx of some six thousand people came to Tulare County at the first news of a gold strike along the Kern River in 1855 and 1856. Stage coach service began between the seaport of San Pedro and Ft. Tejon via Los Angeles. As the population swelled, a brief but emotionally charged battle occurred between American settlers and Indians from the Four Creeks and Tule River.

As Historian Annie Mitchell later wrote in the Tulare County Historical Society bulletin (Los Tulares No. 68, March 1966): "Over the years it has been assumed that the Tule River War was a spontaneous, comic opera affair. It was not and if the Indians had been armed with guns instead of bows and a few pistols they would have run the white men out of the valley." "Early in March," Mitchell continued, "an unnamed cow county Paul Revere dashed into Visalia yelling that 500 head of cattle had been stolen in Yokohl Valley. The men who went to investigate found that a rancher in Frasier Valley had had a calf stolen."

This should have ended the affair but then a fire in a sawmill east of Visalia was also attributed to Indians, a militia was raised, the Indians fortified themselves at present day Battle Mountain near Springville, and the militia attacked them. Destruction of the Indians' food caches in the mountains, where the women and children were hidden, and use of a cannon broke down the Indians' ability to resist. General Beale enforced a unilateral treaty upon the various tribes who participated in the resistance, although the Yaudanches living near the South Fork of the Tule River never signed the treaty.

Tule River Farm or Madden Farm established in 1858.

In 1858, a farm attached to the Tejon Agency was established on the site of a former Koyeti village at the base of the foothills near the present town of Porterville. The farm was established on 1,280 acres on the South Fork of Tule River in sections 32, 33, 34,

T. 21 S - R.28 E., later the site of the Alta Vista School.

Increasingly the Indians in Tulare County were prevented from hunting and gathering their food. The settlers' domestic pigs, allowed to run wild, depleted the black acorn harvests that were the year-round staple of the Indian diet. The Yokuts baskets so prized by collectors today, and costing thousands of dollars on the international art market, were the result of an economy that needed containers to collect and transport raw acorns, winnow or sift acorn meal, and cook the soup or porridge using fire-heated rocks placed inside.

Now the Indians were expected to become farmers. The Tule River Reservation consistently produced the highest crop yields of the four reservations established in California during this period. But the Tule River Indians soon became suspicious and reluctant to contribute more than was needed for their personal subsistence. The problem was documented yearly in reports to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington D.C., but without remedy.