THE LAVA BEDS MONUMENT AND THE MAKING OF CALIFORNIA’S “LAST” INDIAN WAR
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More than fifty years after the Modoc War, a new generation sought to commemorate the war’s fallen and acknowledge the importance of the events that happened in the Lava Beds in 1872–1873. While some advocates such as J. D. Howard worked for designation of the area as a national monument, others, notably the Alturas Parlor of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, worked to establish a physical memorial to the shattering events that occurred there. At the time, dedicating the memorial plaque and statue was considered an important occasion that was acknowledged in local and regional newspapers, and generated a heightened awareness and appreciation for the historical importance of the Modoc War and the Lava Beds National Monument. However, partly because that memorial statute has been lost over time, it and the occasion surrounding its dedication have been mostly forgotten.

On June 13, 1926 a procession of more than 175 cars worked its way down the dirt and gravel roads of Siskiyou and Modoc Counties to a small bluff overlooking the verdant green of the newly reclaimed Tule Lake. Past the freshly homesteaded farms and ranches of this prospering corner of California, Modoc War veteran Captain Oliver Cromwell Applegate led the procession along with leaders of the Alturas Parlor of the Native Daughters of the Golden West, Native Sons of the Golden West, and the Alturas Chamber of Commerce. Shortly after crossing into what is now Lava Beds National Monument, the cavalcade made a brief detour to honor the site of Colonel Gillem’s encampment, where for five months, more than one thousand soldiers from the U.S. Army, Hot Springs Indian scouts and militiamen from Oregon and California laid siege to a small encampment of Modoc Indians led by Captain Jack.1 After paying respects to the ruined remains of this bygone fortress where thirty men who “met their fate in the lava beds” were once laid to rest, Applegate solemnly led the procession to the site where, on April 11, 1873, one of the most “tragic, yet romantic incidents of the Modoc War” was commemorated that day.2 Among the predominately Californian crowd of more than a thousand, members of the Klamath Falls chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and the Helping Hand Society milled about on the periphery. Although a healthy contingent of the audience were from Malin, Medford, and even Portland, the event’s main architects were from California. Indeed, after months of trying to influence the
War, the Oregon contingency had to content themselves with making a few perfunctory words and selling a handful of sandwiches, ice cream cones, and cups of coffee.

The commemoration began with a performance of the “Star Spangled Banner” followed by a rendition of “I Love You California.” Only as an afterthought was “Oregon, My Oregon” added towards the end of the program. After several speeches, Catherine E. Gloster removed the draped American flag to reveal the monument beneath. Featuring a bronze-cast golden bear that had been wounded by Indian arrows atop a cairn of local lava rocks, the plaque read:

TO COMMEMORATE THE HEROISM OF GENERAL EDWARD R. S. CANBY OTHER OFFICERS AND SOLDIERS AND PIONEER SETTLERS WHO SACRIFICED THEIR LIVES ON THIS BATTLEFIELD DURING THE MODOC WAR THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED AND DEDICATED BY ALTURAS PARLOR 159 N.D.G.W. ASSISTED BY GRAND CHAPTER ROYAL ARCH MASONS OTHER FRATERNAL AND CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS AND CITIZENS 1926 A.D.

The message presented during the day and contained within the monument portrayed the Modoc War as a profoundly significant event in California history and as a symbol for the promise of Manifest Destiny. The golden bear represented the state of California. Wounded as it was, the bear roared on, wrestling the land from its vanquished Indian enemy. The only remaining evidence of the once-threatening presence of Indians was a single arrow lodged in the bear’s shoulder. The “Star Spangled Banner” signaled to everyone that the event was part of the American saga of nation-building, while “I Love You California” reinforced the commemorators’ claim that the Modoc War was a part of California’s past. The plaque would serve as a keeper of this memory, a permanent marker of the “last Indian war” and an enduring celebration of California’s perseverance and its “savage Indians.” According to the paper, the Alturas Plain-Dealer, the monument commemorated “the rugged character of the brave men who broke forever the Indian dominion in Southern Oregon and Northern California, and paved the way for the white man’s freedom in both for the white man and the Indian. In this way the statue and plaque, or serving to commemorate the death of G. C. S. Canby and his fellow soldiers, in fact serve as a monument to California’s pioneer spirit.

If the content and form of the monument was not enough to inseparably locate the Modoc War within California’s past, Welch’s speeches reinforced the importance of the conflict to the state’s narrative of progress. In a lecture delivered in front of the Cross outlining the history of California, Hilliard E. Welch, Grand President of the Native Sons of the Golden West, argued that the war was a profoundly significant turning point in the state’s history. In the narrative, the history of California began with Cabrillo’s landing in 1542 in San Diego Bay and thereby wedding the Golden State to its Hispanicized past. Welch proceeded to trace California’s history chronologically, focusing on the Mission period, the pleasure温柔 of the Grandees of the old Spanish, and the days of Gold, of pioneers journeying westward,” until, inevitably, he came to the “Indian uprisings.” In Welch’s vision, the “soldier heroes of the Modoc War are worthy of remembrance and honored as “asked for charitable consideration” viewpoint of the Indians who were forced ever further westward by the march of civilization.” Welch concluded his history by pointing to “our present and progress and development.” For Welch, the Modoc War marked the end of a new stage in California’s development and fulfillment of the promises of Manifest Destiny.
Why did event organizers choose to portray the Modoc War as an essentially Californian event? While some pre-1926 historians categorized the war as part of California’s history - most notably writers like Theodore Henry Hittell, who, in his 1897 four-volume History of California, declared the Modoc War “The last and most remarkable of all the Indian troubles in California” - many did not. Indeed, the earliest Modoc War histories tended to consider it part of Oregon’s past. For example, in 1888, historian Hubert Howe Bancroft included Frances Fuller Victor’s account of the war in his History of Oregon, concluding that it was “the most remarkable [war] that ever occurred in the history of aboriginal extermination.” Likewise, the much-celebrated 1905 An Illustrated History of Central Oregon presented the war as the paramount event in Oregon’s Klamath County’s history while John B. Horner’s Oregon: Her History, Her Great Men, Her Literature, located the war within the fifth and final “epoch” of Oregon’s history, statehood. Yet, in the summer of 1926, a monument to the Modoc War was consecrated that proclaimed in bronze and stone that it was part of California’s history. While both states have a legitimate claim on the war, it is only through the processes of memorial construction, what scholars call memory-making, that any event becomes grounded within a larger narrative. These larger narratives often are connected with such political identities as nation, citizenship, and race. That the Modoc War is now remembered as California’s “last” Indian war is not an inevitable or natural historical fact. Rather, it is an historical event that is being explained. This article tells the story of a small group in Northern California erecting a monument and in the process claiming the Modoc War as California’s “last” Indian war.

The earliest memorials to the Modoc War in the Lava Beds marked the sites where the white men died. The most enduring of these is and has been Canby’s Cross. Soaring into the sky, Canby’s Cross has gone through several manifestations. The first appeared almost immediately after the 1873 shooting of General Edward R.S. Canby and Eleazer Thomas when United States Army soldiers, or possibly Oregon and California...
volunteers serving in the Lava Beds, erected a makeshift cross out of wood from the Peace Commission’s tent. It was held in place, according to at least one account, by a base of local lava rocks covered in the general's own blood. This makeshift and macabre monument proved insufficient to the destructive forces of weather and time. By June 1880, the original monument had deteriorated and only a board, reading “This marks the spot where the Peace Tent stood April 11, 1873,” remained. It is unclear who originally erected this improvised marker, but over time it was routinely knocked down by cattle grazing in the area. In September 1882, Lt. John S. Parke, while on leave, stopped in the Lava Beds and placed a cross “twelve feet high with arms of four feet” made for him by one John A. Fairchild’s carpenters. Inscribed on the cross-arms “GEN. CA. USA WAS MURDERED HERE BY THE MODOCS APRIL 11 1873.” For four years, Parke’s monument, now Canby’s Cross, would remain the region’s memorial to the Modoc War.

The 1920s saw a revitalization of interest in the sites and memory of the Modoc among white Americans. In 1923, Congressman John E. Raker spearheaded a spirited campaign to revitalize Northern California’s sluggish tourism industry. Seeking a greater share of federal highway dollars for the expansion of “Superior California,” Raker wanted to exploit the financial opportunity of the region’s scenery and legendary past.
support their efforts for increased investment, local boosters sought National Park status for the Lava Beds. The Klamath Record argued that the Lava Beds "should be [a] park" for the "exceptional" opportunities they offered to the scientific community. Likewise, the Siskiyou News singled out the Lava Beds as a "wonderland," with cave formations that "compel the attention and wonder of those who seek the strange and forceful things that nature offers, and its individual history appeals to all." Though Northern California boosters quickly recognized the Lava Beds as a significant location for scientific study or cave-tourism, the site's historical significance soon catapulted the Lava Beds onto the regional and national stage.\footnote{15}

In 1925, the same year that the National Monument was established, the Alturas Parlor of the Native Daughters of the Golden West began a campaign to erect a Modoc War monument in the Lava Beds. The Native Daughters, along with the fraternal branch of the organization the Native Sons of the Golden West, were patriotic organizations whose missions were to preserve California's history by venerating its pioneering past. Moreover, they sought to promote a particular version of the state's history that valorized and legitimized white American ownership. From their founding in the late nineteenth century, the organizations began a rigorous campaign of constructing, dedicating and funding numerous monuments and statues across California.\footnote{16}

In garnering support for their project to build a pioneer monument to the Modoc War, the Alturas Parlor of the Native Daughters launched a fund-raising drive for a new monument, pointing to the national significance of the war and its part in the advancement of "civilization." As they announced in a press release in the Alturas Plain-Dealer directly below an engraving of Uncle Sam paying tribute to a pile of wreaths, "[In the Lava Beds] it was that many a sturdy pioneer paid to Indian savagery the supreme sacrifice paid so oft by those in the van of civilization." The announcement told John C. Frémont had led his invasion of California during the Mexican American War from the Lava Beds, where he had received the "message which caused him to return and participate in the military events which made California the territory of the United States. By working with Congressman Raker and emphasizing the national significances of the Lava Beds, the Alturas Parlor created a version of the war that cast the white pioneer as both victim and victor. It was the pioneers who would be the leading actors in this monument. The Modocs had already been forgotten.\footnote{18}

The Native Daughters found support for their project from prominent local state officials, influential businesses and local organizations. Immediately following the launch of their fund drive, the Alturas Boy Scouts agreed to assist in constructing the monument, and the Modoc County Superintendent of Schools supported the involvement of both teachers and students in "this memorable work."\footnote{18} In early March the Native Daughters announced they would have to raise $1,000 and published the names of donors and the amount donated in their local paper. Throughout March and April, donations flooded in from individuals, businesses as well as organizations such as the Alturas Civic Club, Odd Fellow Lodge, Pythian Sisters and Eagles, the Modoc County Development Board, and Native Daughters of the Golden West Parlor through California.\footnote{19}

In early April, the Sacramento Bee published a lengthy article supporting both the establishment of the Lava Beds as a National Monument under the supervision of the National Park Service and the fund-raising efforts of the Alturas Parlor, suggesting that the whole state would soon be involved in the effort. "Since the Alturas Parlor, Native Daughters began work on the pla...
mark certain spots[,] interest in the Modoc Lava Beds has been aroused in Sacramento, San Francisco and elsewhere and steps may be taken shortly to co-ordinate this interest in the region into some kind of an organization that will sponsor the setting aside of the Modoc Lava Beds as a national monument." Following the Sacramento Bee story, donations increased as individuals, towns and organizations throughout northern California threw their support behind the monument.20

Efforts to preserve the Lava Beds and to raise money for the pioneer monument gained additional momentum when local groups decided to build a float and participate in California’s Diamond Jubilee Parade and celebration. Held September 9, 1925 in San Francisco, the parade celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of California’s statehood. According to the Alturas Plain-Dealer, it was to be “the grandest celebration ever to be held in any State, and is to be a Pageant of the different epochs of California history.”21 The float planned and designed by a committee of the Native Daughters was one of many that would “depict the history of the state.” Modoc County’s float was designed to capture “the epoch of 1872, when the last Indian War was fought.” It was believed that participating in the Diamond Jubilee would be “a splendid opportunity for the Modoc [County] to promote her early history and to publicize her present problems.” In this picture parade, the Modoc would bring past events which have contributed to the making of our great and glorious state of California.

After publicizing its float, the Alturas Parlor of the Lava Beds National Monument, on August 28, 1925, in the Alturas Union High School bulletin, stated that the event was a success. September 9, 1925, “the island County’s float participated in the state’s Diamond Jubilee.

Following the Alturas Parlor’s efforts in promoting their past as central to California’s history, the float’s design emphasized the importance of the Modoc Indian story of California. According to the Alturas Plain-Dealer, the float was “gaily decorated with shrubbery and wigwams, and contained two real Indians from Modoc County, Jim Brown and two children and wife of Likely. These Indians and the two children prepared for themselves magnificently, and they were splendid figures.” The float also emphasized the presence and appeal of these Modocs, noting, “They were real Indians in the parade with the appearance of an Indian 110 years old who was behind the Modoc float.”22 Clearly the authenticity of the float’s historical accuracy and Modoc County’s ability to present “authentic” Indians was a source of pride for the region.

The San Francisco Chronicle covered the presence of Modoc Indians in the celebration, but emphasized the need for further encouragement of their participation. Described as “the Modoc Indian warriors,” Jim Bayler and George Fuller were represented as sporting “War bonnets, blankets, paint, tomahawks, battle axes of war.”23
bison hunts and tepee councils." Greeted at the San Francisco Ferry terminal by a delegation of former Modoc County residents, Bayley, Brown, Fuller and their families were conducted to the Hotel Herald in San Francisco's Tenderloin District. For the remainder of the Diamond Jubilee celebration, the Modocs enjoyed all the excitement the city had to offer, taking car rides through the crowded streets, "fully appreciative of the thrills of modern high-pressure metropolitanism." Regardless of how modern they appeared when driving down Lombard Street, once placed upon a papier-mâché cart and flogged down Market Street, Jim Bayley, George Brown and George Fuller came to typify California's "frontier days when," according to the San Francisco Chronicle, "their race was making its last stand against the inroads of civilization."24 Despite their "modern" behavior, their identity as Indians rendered them in the eyes of white Californians as relics of a bygone era - they were imagined to be a tragically disappearing race despite their all-too-evident survival. Moreover, in the hands of the Native Daughters and newspaper publishers, the Modoc War became central to the representation of Modoc County, its white citizenry, and its glorious past. The war was becoming a central part of the story of California's history.

Even before the Diamond Jubilee, the efforts of the California-based Native Daughters of the Golden West to memorialize the Modoc War had caught the attention of Oregonians who wanted a more active role in the construction and design of a monument so close to the state border. In late May, the Native Daughters' committee in charge of organizing the fund raising and construction of the Lava Beds pioneer monument received a letter from several "patriotic organizations" in Malin, just across the California-Oregon border, requesting a role in the design of the monument. The response was immediate. Using the Alturas Plain-Dealer as their mouthpiece, the Native Daughters said they were "willing to cooperate on other monuments, but [they] wish[ed] to be consulted at all steps of the way."25 The design had been prepared in consultation with Paul D. Fair, a San Francisco sculptor, and was to feature a Golden Gate, a wounded Indian arrow as a Californian event. The monument, with the establishment of the Lava Beds National Monument in 1923, would solidly embed this regional narrative onto the landscape. The Alturas Plain-Dealer rebuked the Oregon organization by suggesting the Lava Beds contained "no historic sites: "there is room a plenty for wild desolation to satisfy the ambitious claims of all patriotic organizations."26 Clearly, the Oregon contingency might contribute more ideas, but not ideas.

By the summer of 1925, the ultimate shape and form of the monument had been decided without any substantial input from Oregonians. On November 21, 1925, Coolidge signed a Presidential proclamation creating Lava Beds National Monument for preserving the Modoc War battleground. Seven months later, on June 13, 1926, the monument was dedicated to General Canby, the Modoc soldiers, and the California pioneers who died during the war. The dedication was dedicated with honor and virtue, but not with recognition of Oregon's contribution. The monument, with its narrative of honor and heroism, recognized the deaths of white soldiers and volunteers, but refused to acknowledge the violence committed against Modoc men and women. Their deaths and losses were not considered something to commemorate. Moreover, by representing their sacrifice with a statue of a wounded Modoc and the monument directly associated the view of the war with an assault on the Oregon territory. Through commemoration and memory, the Native Daughters clearly and forcibly
defined the Modoc War as California's "last" Indian war.

News of the monument's dedication spread across the country, eliciting a variety of responses from individuals as far afield as Wisconsin, Colorado and North Carolina. Those with ties to the Modoc War wrote letters or even traveled to the park itself. One veteran, Charles Hardin of Denver, Colorado, wrote to the Alturas Plain Dealer after receiving news of the monument. His letter reflects both the deep-felt meaning of inclusion as well as the significance of the historical narrative presented by the Native Daughters in their monument:

The reading of this article, which came to me on the anniversary of one of our hardest and, to my mind, most glorious fights of the war - the battle at Dry (or Soros) [sic] Lake, May 10, 1873, gave me a real thrill. I wish that the Native Daughters might know how much I, a veteran of that war, appreciates [sic] their work. I may never see the monument, but so long as I live, I shall remember, with gratitude, all those who have worked for it.78

Hardin's sentiments suggest that on an individual level, the placing of a monument meant something more than simply inclusion within a national or regional narrative. The monument, for Hardin, and probably many other veterans, was an acknowledgment...
and validation of his memory and the lasting importance of the Modoc War.

If the monument validated Hardin's memory, it also provided others with the impetus to re-establish their own connections, or at least perceived connections, with the place. Hearing of the newly established monument, Miss A. A. Witzel of Wisconsin, granddaughter of Thomas Wright, a colonel in the Modoc War, thought it an opportune time to visit California and view this marker to her ancestor's past. Arriving in Sacramento in 1928, Witzel was disturbed to discover that no monument existed. Her grandfather, who had led his troops to their deaths during the Thomas-Wright battle, was not memorialized by name. In fact, according to William Brown of the U.S. Forest Service, location of her grandfather's death was unknown. Although Miss Witzel traveled to Klamath Falls, interviewed several white veterans of the Modoc War and consulted park officials, no monument to her grandfather was ever located. The Lava Beds, and by extension the Modoc War, now that they had been properly memorialized, were a part of the national historic narrative. For individuals like Charles Hardin and Miss Witzel, the monument had transformed the Lava Beds into a place to visit and an opportunity to reconnect with a part of their heritage.39

From 1934 through the 1940s, the National Park Service, now the stewards of the Lava Beds, produced several informational brochures and led guided tours of the park's historical sites. But, like the monument, these brochures and other visitor information sought to remember and valorize the death of white soldiers while downplaying or forgetting the deaths of Modocs. For example, the "History" section of the 1931 edition of the National Monument's brochure said the park once was inhabited by Indians, but their past claim upon the land had ended with no connection to present-day Indians.

The Lava Beds region was the territory of Indian races long since vanished and markings in many of the caves bleached human bones are evident of their occupancy by tribes whose history is unknown to their successors, the Modocs...

In this way the Modocs' claim to the Lava Beds was figuratively erased through what scholars term "knowledge production" and the making of history. By writing narratives that reduced Indians to "first-guess human beings," the federal government, denied them the honor of a long history of indigeneity in the region.40

While ignoring the continuing impact of Modoc people to the region's history, the brochure also asserted the innocence of settlers who fell "victim" to Modoc attacks. The attack on John C. Frémont's expedition in 1846 is portrayed as a raid carried out by a Modoc war party. "Had it not been for the prompt action of the famous scout, Carston, who was Fremont's companion, the entire party would have been annihilated," the pamphlet informs the reader. No mistakes were made, however, of Frémont's retaliatory attack on the first Indian village he happened upon in which his men murdered and raped more than twenty Klamath Indian women and children. Their bodies were burned, the expedition burned the village to the ground. Writing afterwards, Kentucky's Governor, called the slaughter a "beautiful sight." Frémont recalled that "this Indian is always close, incurring more concern for life and far more sanguinary, than ordinary contests between civilized men. Furthermore, by identifying Frémont's men as "settlers," the brochure portrayed whites as settlers rather than soldiers of an expanding American empire. The logic of the brochure, the only worth mentioning in the Lava Beds was that of whites, despite what the original meaning might contain.42

Narratives of the Modoc War continued to be produced throughout the mid-
memorialists actively expanded the meaning of the project to include monument fund raising. It even became state jubilee.

Moreover, the form and content of the Lava Beds monument influenced the way people remember the Modoc War. By claiming it was a Californian event and identifying what it was and its tragic victims, the memorial made history even as it recounted it. Through the lens of this one event, we can see how the history we tell, write, and remember are as much a product of their present as they are a reflection of the past. In their monument, the Native Daughters of the Golden West used the history of the Modoc War to advance their own agenda and, in the process, claimed the Modoc War as California’s “last Indian war.”

What began as an attempt to attract federal highway dollars became a cause célèbre for local sorority and fraternal organizations and businesses to construct a grandiose narrative of the past and connect that history with regional and national narratives of Manifest Destiny. Once the transformation had begun, the site played a role in the national conversation.

Notes

1. “Monument to Be Dedicated in Lava Beds,” Klamath Falls Evening Herald, June 12, 1926, 1.
3. “Caravan to Lava Beds Starts at 7:00 Sharp,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, June 11, 1926, 1.
4. “Veterans of ’72 Recall War Memories and History,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, June 18, 1926, 1.
5. “Monument is Dedicated,” Klamath Falls Evening Herald, 1.
7. “Soldier’s Monument Site Located in Modoc Lava Beds,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, September 4, 1925, 1. Notice the contradiction within this narrative of the war as making room for Indian progress, a progress only possible when relocated to Indian country.
12. J. D. Howard interview, May 15, 1961: interviewed by Ben Schwartz, transcribed by the author, Lava Beds National Monument Research Library (hereafter LBNMRL). Howard based his information on stories told to him by his good friend, Peter Schonchin, a Modoc who witnessed Canby’s death.
13. John S. Parke to Assistant Adjutant General, October 10, 1882 in Parke Papers, LBNMRL 973.82 PAR 1882, No. 1381.
14. For a full account of Parke’s trip to the Lava Beds in 1882, see John S. Parke, “A Visit to the Lava Beds,” A Brief Account of the Modoc War of 1873,” Parke Papers, LBNMRL, 973.82 PAR, Acc. No. 1381, 1.


17. “Native Daughters Launch Drive for Monument Fund,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, February 20, 1925, 1.

18. “Native Daughters Get Valuable Allies,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, February 27, 1925, 1.


20. Sacramento Bee, April 1, 1925, 1; “Sacramento Bee Boosts Modoc Project,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, April 1, 1925, 1.


23. “Modoc Float a Credit to County at Diamond Jubilee,” Alturas Plain-Dealer, September 18, 1925, 1.


26. Ibid, 8.

27. Proclamation, November 21, 1925, Administrative Records, LBNM Archives, LBNMRL.

28. Charles Hardin to the Editor of the Alturas Plain Dealer, May 10, 1926, LBNM Museum, Historical Documents and Photographs, Box 1, LABE 7854, LBNMRL.

29. “Search For Historic Monument Leads Woman Across Continent,” Sacramento Bee, March 24, 1926, various newspaper clippings from “Brown Clippings, 1925–1940” LBNM Archive/Museum, LBNMRL.

30. USDA - Forest Service, Modoc National Forest, Lava Beds National Monument: Modoc Nation California, 1931, LBNM Archive/Museum, LABE Park Brochures Collection, LBNMRL.

31. The idea of American Indians as the “First Guests” or “First Visitors” of the National Park System goes back to the mid-twentieth century. For a fuller discussion of the discourse of the “First Guests” as a way to dispossessing and undermining Indian peoples’ claim to their land, see Mark David Spence, Desecration and the Making of the National Parks, Oxford University Press, New York, 2006.


33. Interview with Former Superintendent Craig Dorman by author, July 1, 2008, Klamath Falls, Oregon. See Brown 2008, 198, who claims 1965 as the probable date of removal.