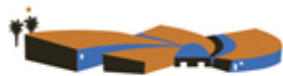


# Since Time Immemorial

## Abstract:

According to Cahuilla bird songs, the oral literature of the Cahuilla people, the Cahuilla Indians have occupied the region now known as the Coachella Valley since time immemorial. Recent excavations in the Tahquitz Canyon area mirror these stories, revealing evidence of human habitation in the Palm Springs area as early as 3000 B.C.



AGUA CALIENTE CULTURAL MUSEUM

According to Cahuilla bird songs – the oral literature of the Cahuilla people – the Cahuilla Indians have occupied the region now known as the Coachella Valley since time immemorial. Recent excavations in the Tahquitz Canyon area mirror these stories, revealing evidence of human habitation in the Palm Springs area as early as 3000 B.C.

The Cahuilla Indians are the aboriginal people of this region. They traditionally occupied a diverse territory of desert, canyons, passes, and mountains with elevations ranging from 273 feet below sea level at the Salton Sink to 11,000 feet at Mount Jacinto. These traditional territories spanned an area of about 2,400 square miles. Estimates place the population between 6,000 and 10,000 prior to European contact.

Today there are a total of nine Cahuilla bands, each with their own reservation. These reservations are: Agua Caliente, Augustine, Cabazon, Cahuilla, Los Coyotes, Morongo, Ramona, Santa Rosa, and Torres-Martinez.

The Agua Caliente Indian Reservation is named for the hot spring in downtown Palm Springs. This reservation comprises a little over forty-nine sections of land, or approximately 32,000 acres in three townships. The reservation was set aside for the use and occupancy of the Agua Caliente people during the administrations of President Grant in 1876 and President Hayes in 1877. It is not a contiguous reservation but a checkerboard of alternate (even numbered) sections in the cities of Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, and unincorporated Riverside County.



*A Desert Cahuilla Woman* photographed by Edward Curtis in the early 20th century  
Anthropologists during this same period labeled Cahuilla groups as Desert, Pass, and Mountain Cahuilla

## Melkishum (Strangers)

**1769 -**

The Spanish, who had occupied Mexico since the 1500s, establish a religious and military presence in California by building Franciscan missions along the coast. In 1769, a mission is built at San Diego -- the first of many.

**1776 -**

Mission San Gabriel establishes an *asistencia* closer to the mountains and nearer to Cahuilla territory where it begins to impact Cahuilla life and belief systems.



1828 sketch of Mission San Gabriel by Alfred Robinson

**-1774**

Spaniard Juan Bautista de Anza, with the help of Native American guides, establishes an overland route from Mexico to the California coast. He is presumably the first European to make contact with the Cahuilla people.

## Further Encroachment

**-Early 1800s**

Cahuilla Indians begin traveling to Missions to work as seasonal laborers.

**1822 -**

Mexico gains independence from Spain after twelve years of fighting.

**-1823-6**

Captain Jose Romero establishes an overland route from California to Mexico. He encounters a hot spring in the area now known as Palm Springs and names it Agua Caliente (hot water).



Modern rendering of Romero's expeditions, 1823-1826  
Courtesy of Palm Springs Art Museum

## Annexation and Statehood

**1830s -**

Jose Lebacho and other Cahuilla Indians construct irrigation ditches in the area now known as Palm Springs to water crops and orchards.

**1850 -**

California becomes a State

**-1848**

The United States wins the Mexican-American War, annexing half of Mexico's territory, including California. A stage line is established through Cahuilla territory. Settlers begin to occupy the region.



Palm Springs stagecoach station as sketched by Carl Eytel

*Courtesy of the Braun Research Library, Autry National Center of the American West, Los Angeles; Photo #EYTEL.79.390*

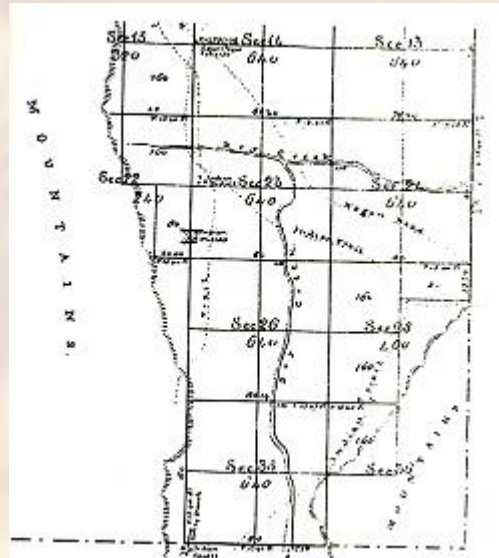
## Lands Divided

**1852 -**

The Treaty of Temecula is drawn between the United States government and Cahuilla leaders setting aside lands for the occupation of Cahuilla, Luiseño, and Serrano Indian tribes. Unbeknownst to the Indians, the treaty is never ratified.

**-1853**

The area now known as the Coachella Valley is surveyed and platted as government surveyors search for appropriate routes for a transcontinental railroad. The survey report describes an encounter with Cahuilla people at the Agua Caliente Hot Spring.



Palm Springs area as depicted on a federal land survey map published in 1856

## Reservation Established

### 1860s -

Following the establishment of a stagecoach line, the Southern Pacific Railroad plans to build a line through the Coachella Valley. The Federal government grants the railroad ten miles of odd-numbered sections of land on each side of the railroad right-of-way.



Postcard featuring a moving train passing by Mount San Jacinto, near Whitewater

### -1875

Cahuilla Indians help to construct a future railroad route through the Coachella Valley.

### -1876

President Grant establishes Indian reservations across Cahuilla territory, including the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation. That same year, the Southern Pacific rail service reaches the Coachella Valley.

### -1877

President Hayes extends the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation to include even-numbered sections.

## From Ramona to Tourism

### 1885 -

Indian Agent Helen Hunt Jackson writes the novel *Ramona*, highlighting the lives of southern California Indians. The novel follows the publication of her official report describing the deplorable living conditions of several tribal groups, including the Agua Caliente.

### -1887

The first hotel in Palm Springs is constructed at the Agua Caliente Hot Spring on land leased from the Tribe. Individuals suffering from pulmonary and tubercular conditions are drawn to the desert and the Hot Spring in the hope of curing their ailments. A simple bathhouse is also constructed on the site.



Early postcard featuring the Palm Springs Hotel

## Cultural Assimilation

### -1890 & 1892

St. Boniface Indian School is founded in Banning, California. The Catholic boarding school, focused on vocational and religious training, serves about one hundred Indian students in grades one through eight, many from nearby Indian reservations. Two years later the federal government opens the Perris Indian School, housing more than one hundred Indian students. The school's focus is agricultural training.

### 1904 -

Sherman Institute, a government-run Indian boarding school, opens in Riverside. It houses students from more than fifty tribes and focuses on vocational training to serve mainstream American society. Its purpose, like other Indian boarding schools, is cultural assimilation.



St. Boniface Indian School Band in Banning, California (1927)  
Gift of Corinne Siva

## Nukil Forbidden & the Mission Indian Federation

### 1910s -

Agua Caliente leaders decide to demolish the rustic bathhouse located over the Agua Caliente Hot Spring and construct a new one in an effort to promote health-focused tourism and to generate tribal income.

### 1919 -

Southern California Indian tribes, frustrated with federal policies and practices, form the Mission Indian Federation – a pro-sovereignty political organization asserting tribal rights.

### -1918

The Bureau of Indian Affairs formally forbids the most important ceremony in Cahuilla traditional life, the *nukil* (mourning) ceremony, fearing that such gatherings promote traditional Indian culture and compromise cultural assimilation efforts.



Membership dues receipt from the Mission Indian Federation dated 1927  
Gift of Jeff Greenstein

## A City Within a Reservation

**1930-**

Alejo Patencio, the Tribe's *net* (or traditional leader), dies.  
Tribal leader Francisco Patencio assumes the responsibilities of this role.

**1938 -**

The City of Palm Springs is incorporated. It forms a checkerboard pattern of odd numbered squares within the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation.

**1941 -**

The Agua Caliente Band signs a 25-year land lease to allow the City of Palm Springs to construct a new airport and to promote local tourism.

**-Early 1930s**

The Agua Caliente Band constructs a new bathhouse at the Hot Spring in response to Palm Springs' increasing popularity with health seekers and the Hollywood film industry.

**-1939**

Revered shaman and ceremonial leader, Pedro Chino, dies at well over one hundred years old. Famous as a powerful spiritual leader and healer, he had long fought for traditional rights and tribal political autonomy.



Pedro Chino  
Gift of Frank Bogert

## First All Woman Tribal Council

**1943 -**

The book *Stories & Legends of the Palm Springs Indians* by Agua Caliente elder and ceremonial leader Francisco Patencio is published. Concerned that Cahuilla people were no longer learning sacred songs, ceremonies, or even the Cahuilla language, Patencio worked with ethnographers to help preserve such knowledge.

**1952 -**

The Agua Caliente Band passes its first modern

**-1951**

Ceremonial leader Albert Patencio dies and the decision is made to burn and not rebuild the ceremonial house,

Constitution and By-Laws.

formally making a break with traditional life.

1955 –

-Mid-1950s



The Agua Caliente Band forms the first all-woman tribal council in the United States. This group and subsequent councils successfully oppose federal termination efforts and obtain the first long-term lease legislation in the United States for Indian lands, clearing the way for tribal land development across the country.

Arguing on behalf of non-discriminatory land lease reform, Eileen Miguel once famously stated in a federal hearing: "We have valuable land, but you can't eat dirt."

All-woman Tribal Council. L-R: Vice Chairman LaVerne Saubel, Member Elizabeth Monk, Member Gloria Gillette, Chairman Vyola Olinger, Secretary Eileen Miguel

*Please note there was at least one earlier all-woman business committee prior to the 1955 council pictured here Used by Permission of The (Palm Springs, CA) Desert Sun*

## The Spa

1957 -

-1959

The third and final bathhouse is demolished in preparation for the construction of the Palm Springs Spa.

U.S. Equalization Act is finalized, dividing tribal land individually among its 104 members. Conservators and guardians are assigned to many tribal members to control their land and assets.

1960 -

-1963

Construction of the Palm Springs Spa is completed. Built on reservation land, it is the first long-term Indian land lease in the country.

The Spa Hotel opens for business.



*Palm Springs Spa, Palm Springs, California*  
Postcard showing colonnade, *Dancing Water Nymphs* sculpture, and entrance to the Palm Springs Spa

## Demolition of Section 14

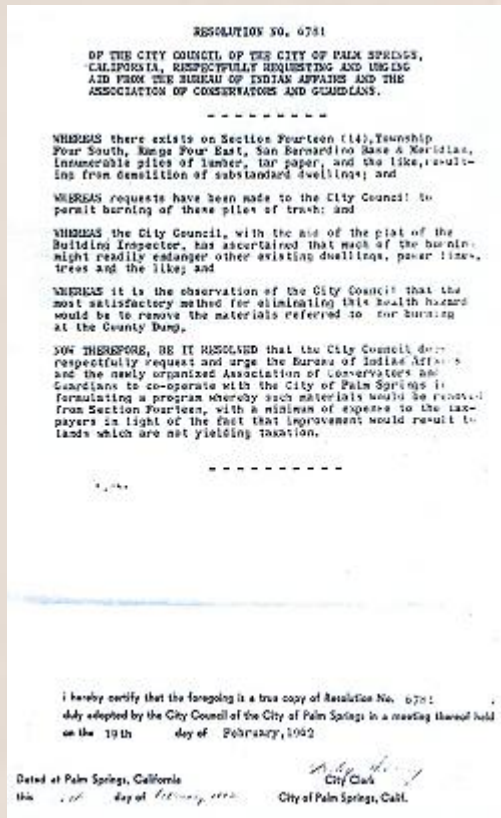
1962 -

-1965

City of Palm Springs *Resolution No. 6781* requests cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the

The book *Golden Checkerboard* is published, purportedly telling the story of Indian land development in Palm

Association of Conservators and Guardians to clear lots on Indian-owned land in Section 14 for speedy re-development, frequently without informing all affected parties, including Indian land owners and Section 14's low-income residents. The subsequent demolition of Section 14 is later described in a California Department of Justice report as "a city engineered holocaust."



City of Palm Springs Resolution No. 6781

Springs. It describes Superior Court Judge Hilton McCabe as a "little white father," lauding the Judge and conservator/executor of Indian estates as being responsible for resolving legal hurdles that had prevented the development of reservation lands. The book's author Ed Ainsworth is later sued by tribal members for defamation of character.

#### -1967

The Department of the Interior begins a probe of the guardianship-conservatorship program. At the same time, journalist George Ringwald of the Press-Enterprise newspaper begins an independent investigation.

#### -1968

Following federal and state investigations into charges of "questionable conduct," the fraudulent conservatorship program, a program that swallowed large portions of Indian estates by placing them into the hands of lawyers, judges, and business owners, is ended.

George Ringwald's investigative reporting on the guardianship-conservatorship program earns the Press-Enterprise a Pulitzer Prize for Meritorious Service.

## Strides in Sovereignty

#### 1975 -

During the 1960s, the Tribe filed a lawsuit against the City of Palm Springs in regards to the question of who has jurisdiction over zoning of Indian lands. The U.S. Supreme Court in 1975 recognized that Indian tribes retain "attributes of sovereignty over both their members and their territory" (*United States v. Mazurie*, 1975).

#### 1980 -

The U.S. Supreme Court again holds that "tribal sovereignty is dependent on, and subordinate to, only the Federal Government, not the States" (*Washington v. Confederated Tribes of Colville Indian Reservation*, 1980).

#### -1977

The Tribe votes to change its name to Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. The original name included the term "Mission Indians" – an inaccuracy since the Agua Caliente Indians were not closely associated with the Spanish Mission system. In that same year, the Tribe entered into land use agreement with the City of Palm Springs – the first such agreement in the country.

#### -1987

The U.S. Supreme Court rules in *California v. the Cabazon Band of Mission Indians* that the regulation of gaming on tribal lands is the province of the tribes. This ultimately

leads to the passage of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act.

## Agua Caliente Band Today



### -Today

The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians continues its legacy of land stewardship and development by entering into land use agreements with neighboring desert cities, developing Indian lands to their highest and best use, and contributing to the economic and social well-being of the Coachella Valley through employment opportunities, ongoing philanthropic giving, and business diversification.

Highlights of the Tribe's enterprises today include:

- Spa Resort Casino and Hotel (Palm Springs)
- Agua Caliente Casino Resort Spa (Rancho Mirage)
- Indian Canyons Golf Resort (Palm Springs)
- Village Traditions residential community (Palm Springs)
- Office Buildings (throughout Palm Springs)
- Tribal Land Planning and Development (Palm Springs, Cathedral City, Rancho Mirage, County of Riverside)

## Primary Sources & Further Reading

We suggest the following source materials for further research on the history of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Materials are available at the Agua Caliente Cultural Museum library by appointment.

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