The Village of Kadema: A Multi-Cultural Gathering Place

Kadema was situated on the north bank of the American River, east of downtown Sacramento. The village was occupied by Native Americans for several thousand years up until the 1930s. In the mid 1800s Hawaiians, brought to New Helvetia by John Sutter, intermarried with local Nisenan women who had familial ties to Kadema. In the late 1800s Kadema became an important regional gathering place and was said to have had two large kums ceremonial structures referred to as dance houses. During the 1900s, Kadema villagers were joined by Chinese and Paiutes who were working seasonally in the nearby hop fields. The last known Nisenan occupant was Tom Cleanso, Captain Mike’s son. Archival research has allowed us to learn about Kadema and its people. It is our hope that descendants of the people who lived at Kadema will also share their stories with us.

Indians from all over came to gather at Kadema and dance in their large kum, like the one pictured above. Special dances, such as mo’lo’k, Condor, were preformed there.

The Sacramento Daily News, June 15, 1857 reported about a “pow-wow” held at Norris’ Ranch near Kadema. Norris’ Ranch and the Indian Rancheria are marked on an 1857 GLO Survey Map of Rancho Del Paso.

Sac State students excavated the village site of Kadema in the late 1950s and early 1960s before the mound was leveled and a residential subdivision was built.

The artifacts recovered from Sac State excavations point to a long period of occupation.

The Nisenan Texts collected by Hans Uldall includes a story about Mike Cleanso and his sister who resided at Kadema. Mike grew up to become chief of Kadema. His son Tom is pictured to the left.

Do you have a story to share?

Kadema was also used as a temporary camping spot for local Indians and others (e.g. Chinese and Paiute Indians) who were working in the nearby hop field. Artifacts recovered from excavations at Kadema include Chinese pottery.

Tom Cleanso (aka Blind Tom) was born at Kadema and was still living there in the 1930s. He was a Nisenan informant for Kroeber, Gayton, and Forde in the 1920s and identified many of the villages along the American River.

The data in this report are all from Tom Cleanso, an Indian of perhaps 90, living near Sacramento. His father was born at Pashuan or Pashune (Pojune), near the mouth of the American river, now within the city limits of Sacramento. His mother was from Yoloch, a valley Nisenan village, on lower Feather river, where the dialect differed somewhat from that of Pashune. Tom himself was born and raised at Kadema, a village 7 or 8 miles up the American river. He has been blind since childhood, is now deaf in one ear and hard of

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