

“Be Brave and Fight!”

Toypurina – the Joan of Arc of California©

Ernest P Salas Teutimes¹ , Andrew Salas², Christina Swindall Martinez³, and Gary Stickel⁴

It has long been said that history is written by the conquerors, not by the conquered. This unfortunate fact has led to misrepresentations of indigenous peoples across the entire United States. We are writing this article to contribute to Native literature in order to correct problems of the past. With this article, we, the Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians, are writing a new kind of history for us – our own history. It is a humanistic history rather than a cold, dispassionate typical study of history. Toypurina⁵ was a Gabrieleño woman who led a revolt against the European conquerors of our homeland in 1785. In the following article, we present what we believe is her true story. In the process, we point out the atrocities, inhumanities, misconceptions, and misrepresentations written about her that have diminished her true, outstanding contribution not only to our people, but to California history, and indeed, to the history of the United States. Toypurina has been represented by non-native peoples as a “witch”, a temptress and a “sorceress” by the official Spanish record and by historians (Bancroft 1884; Temple 1958; Sandos 2007). But, Toypurina is a hero of history, our history. She is a hero in our hearts. She represents the best of us – our efforts to save and preserve our culture and what is left of the natural environment of our ancient homeland.

Sometimes, in order to *right the wrongs* of the past, it is necessary to *write the wrongs* of the past. We are about *righting the wrongs* that have been done to our people, our Native nation and to our homeland. Part of that process is *writing the wrongs* that have occurred to us so that increased awareness will lead to increased mutual understanding and respect. The story of Toypurina is a poignant part of our struggle to achieve those goals. All earth’s people deserve respect and appreciation. If one nation becomes extinct, everyone in the world suffers that loss, whether they realize it or not. We, like all indigenous peoples struggling to maintain their culture and survive in the modern world, look back on our past and our cultural history with two eyes – one with pride for our ancestors and their accomplishments, and one with sadness for the inhumanities they have suffered.

The common threads of all Americans is our love of freedom and our “American dream” to provide the best, both spiritual and material, for our families and for our children’s future. Toypurina is as much American, in those terms, as Betsy Ross, Abigail Adams, Susan B. Anthony, Eleanor Roosevelt, and Coretta Scott King. Toypurina rose to the occasion. She wanted to *right the wrongs* done to her people and to her land. Her story was first published by the renowned historian Hubert Howe Bancroft in his multi-volume *History of California* in 1884⁶. However, the article that has provoked the most interest in Toypurina was published by Thomas Workman Temple II in 1958. He noted that “...she (Toypurina) is the only Indian woman in the colonial records of Alta California, known to have led a revolt against the *padres* and *soldados* of a mission” (Temple 1958, 136). To our knowledge, she is also the only Native American woman to have initiated, organized, and led a revolt against foreign

¹ Ernest P. Salas Teutimes, Spiritual Leader and Chief of the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians

² Andrew Salas, Chairman of the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians

³ Dr. Christina Swindall Martinez, Secretary of the Gabrieleno Band of Mission Indians

⁴ Dr. Gary Stickel, Tribal Archaeologist

⁵ Toypurina was born in what is now the Great Los Angeles area at the village of Japchivit or Juyubit (Johnson and Williams 2007, Harrington Ms) which we believe was located within one mile west of Mission San Gabriel.

⁶ The Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley was named after this historian.

oppression in all American history. She is unique in Native American history and she is unique in American history.

We call Toypurina the “Joan of Arc of California” because the stories of the two women are remarkably alike. Both were religious leaders of their people, both organized revolts against invading foreign powers, both led rebel forces in the field, both were betrayed, both were subjected to sham trials, and both suffered tragic ends (Taylor 2009).



Figure 1. Mission San Gabriel - painting by Edwin Deakin (1838-1923)

Before we present our analysis of the relevant evidence, we will first provide to the reader a brief overview of Toypurina’s revolt. In 1785, she was approached by neophyte (baptized captive) Nicolas José at Mission San Gabriel (Figure 1). He was reacting to the conduct of the Spanish not only to his own situation, but also to the atrocities (murders, whippings, rapes, forced religious conversions, and slave labor) that had been committed against the Gabrieleños from the beginning of the Spanish invasion until that point (Castillo 1978; McCawley 1996). Toypurina accepted the challenge and initiated, organized, and carried out a revolt utilizing an armed force of Indian warriors⁷. On the night of October 25, 1785, Toypurina led her force and attacked the mission. But because a corporal of the guard had become informed of the revolt ahead of time, the Spanish mounted an ambush. When Toypurina arrived, she and some of her warriors were arrested. She was then subjected to a show trial at the mission where no less that the Governor of Alta California, Pedro Fages, sat in judgment. As punishments, she was exiled, baptized into Christianity, and eventually buried at Mission San Juan Bautista (Figure 2).

⁷ Indian revolts, such as the Chumash Revolt of 1824, against the Spanish conquests were common in California (Cook 1943; Stickel and Cooper 1969; Castillo 1978).

For the full book, please go to Amazon to purchase: