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## **In a Historic Move, the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian Unveils Secret Treaty**



For the first time in history, one of the 18 treaties negotiated and signed during the Gold Rush between the United States and the American Indian Nations of California, but secretly unratified by the United States Senate in 1852, went on display to the public today.

The Treaty of Temecula, also known as Treaty K, was unveiled in the presence of the descendants—leaders of three of the Native Nations—who were affected by the Senate’s failure to ratify the agreement: Jeff Grubbe, Chairman, of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians; Mark Macarro, Chairman, of the Pechanga Band of Luiseno Indians; and Sabrina Nakhjavanpour, Treasurer, and Melonie Calderon, Business Committee Member, of the San Manuel Band of Mission Indians.

Treaty K is just one of the 18 treaties that was submitted to the U.S. Senate on June 1, 1852 by President Millard Fillmore. Unbeknownst to the Native nations’ signatories, the Senate rejected the treaties and ordered them to be held in secrecy for over fifty years.

Meanwhile, left undefended by United States Armed Forces, Native nations across California were overrun by white settlers and American Indians were subjected to violence at the hands of state and local militias. Considered illegal aliens on their own land without state or federal legal recourse, it led to their ethnic cleansing. The American Indian population in California plunged from perhaps 150,000 to 30,000 between 1846 and 1870. The 1880 census records 16,277 American Indians in California—a 90% decline in their population since the onset of the Gold Rush.

Quoting from a November 22, 1852 letter by California Indian Affairs superintendent Edward F. Beale to U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs Luke Lea, Chairman Grubbe read to the group:

“The wretched remnant which escapes starvation on the one hand, and the relentless whites on the other, only do so to rot and die of a loathsome disease, the penalty of Indian association with frontier civilization....I have seen it, and seeing all this, I cannot help them. I know they starve; I know they perish by hundreds; I know that they are fading away with startling rapidity; but I cannot help them....They are not dangerous....It is a crying sin that our government, so wealthy and so powerful, should shut its eyes to the miserable fate of these rightful owners of the soil.”

Chairman Macarro noted that September 23<sup>rd</sup> is American Indian Day in California. “It also happens to be the day on which the Pechanga Nation people were evicted in 1852. Seeing this treaty on display is both horrific as it shines daylight on the cheat and fraud that accompanied the sale of our land. But California Indian nations had treaties with the United States, and this is validation,” he said.

“There is so much our people have to do as a whole,” said Treasurer Nakhjavanpour. “Yes, we are still here. What happened during the Gold Rush is different to what we see happening today at Standing Rock with oil. But there are similarities in the quest for commodities near American Indian nation land. We have to keep fighting.”

On loan from the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) through January 2017, including the anniversary date of the treaty on Jan. 5, Treaty K will be on display in the museum’s award-winning exhibition “Nation to Nation: Treaties Between the United States and American Indian Nations,” which opened on Sept. 21, 2014 and will stay open through Spring 2020. The full text of the treaty is available on the Nation to Nation [project website](#).

“Consent is at the heart of the treaty relationship,” said Kevin Gover, director of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian. “That is what this exhibition is all about. And it is not just about the past, it is about the present and future, too. Just imagine what the world would be were decisions are made bi-laterally. When both parties agree, good things result, both can thrive. When they are made unilaterally or when agreements are not kept, bad things happen.”

Images from the event are available free of charge [online](#) with the password “Smithsonian.”

### **About the National Museum of the American Indian**

The National Museum of the American Indian is committed to advancing knowledge and understanding of the Native cultures of the Western Hemisphere—past, present and future—through partnership with Native people and others. For additional information about the National Museum of the American Indian, visit [AmericanIndian.si.edu](http://AmericanIndian.si.edu). Follow the museum via social media on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

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