Number 60 | Winter 2026

CALIFORNIAN

California History Center & Foundation
A Center at De Anza College for the Study and Preservation of State and Regional History

"If you hold your hand closed, nothing good can come in. The open hand is blessed, for it gives in abundance, even as it receives."

– Biddy Mason

De Anza College

A Taste of History

Movements Without Borders: Expanding the Story of Belonging

California History Center's 16th annual "A Taste of History" event will bring the community together for food, wine, entertainment and fellowship. Join us as we consider how a shared commitment to freedom, dignity and a belief in the value of every voice expands democracy and strengthens the community we all depend on. Proceeds support De Anza student multimedia, oral history and archival projects that preserve and share our local history.

March 21, 2026 (Sat)
4:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Tickets available ($95) at: https://qrco.de/bgdUPB

- **Welcome:** FHDA Chancellor Lee Lambert
- **Acknowledgements:** De Anza President Omar Torres
- **Historical framing:** CHCF Board Member Ruben Abrica
- **Poets:** Claudia Melendez and Joseph LaCour
- **Music:** Foothill Beats drumming group
- **Art Exhibit:** "Expanding the Story of Belonging"
- **Catering:** Bun Me Up (Asian fusion)
- **Wineries:** Cooper Garrod Vineyards, Farm Day Family Winery, House Family Winery, Kings Mountain Vineyards, Silver Mountain Vineyards

Location: California History Center, De Anza College
21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA 95014

Parking: Flint Center Garage

Contact: Lori Clinchard; clinchardlori@fhda.edu

California History Center & Foundation

Calendar

Winter Quarter

MARCH

4 Author Talk: Gregorio Mora-Torres "Don Magdaleno's Story: A Typical but Memorable Life of a Mexican Migrant"; CHC; 10:30am–12:00pm

21 A Taste of History '26; CHC; 4:00–7:00pm

27 **End of Winter Quarter**

Spring Quarter

APRIL

6 **First Day of Spring Quarter**

MAY

12 Indigenous Peoples' Day / Columbus Day

23-25 **Memorial Day Weekend — no classes, offices closed**

JUNE

19 **Juneteenth Holiday — no classes, offices closed**

21 Summer Solstice

26 **End of Spring Quarter**

27 Graduation

JULY / AUGUST

California History Center (CHC)
Closed for Summer Quarter

SEPTEMBER

9 California Admission Day

18 College Opening Day; CHC Opens for Academic Year

21 **Fall classes begin**

California History Center & Foundation

A Center for the Study of State and Regional History
De Anza College

21250 Stevens Creek Blvd., Cupertino, CA (408) 864-8712
www.DeAnza.edu/CalifHistory

Trianon Building Hours: Tuesday through Thursday 10:00am–4:00pm

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Cover photo: Biddy Mason, ca. 1865. Credit: USC Digital Library and California Historical Society Collection

Director's Report

Lori Clinchard

The Work of Belonging

When belonging is restricted, movements arise, and people push back out of a belief that democracy expands when people refuse to be confined by the "single-story" others assign to them.

This year's "A Taste of History" theme, *Movements Without Borders: Expanding the Story of Belonging*, invites us to consider what happens when individuals and communities step forward rather than step back. Californians living at the edges of belonging have often reshaped the center. Their actions remind us that freedom is not a fixed inheritance passed intact from one generation to the next, but that it is something to be continually interpreted, tested, and renewed by people willing to act. When belonging is restricted, movements arise, and people push back out of a belief that democracy expands when they refuse to be confined by the singular narrative others assign to them.

Our 2026 program highlights stories of local individuals committed to freedom, dignity, and the importance of community. The life of **Mitsuru "Mits" Koshiyama**, who resisted the draft during the incarceration of Japanese Americans in World War II, raises questions about conscience, integrity, and citizenship. What does it mean to be asked to defend democratic freedoms while being denied them yourself? What does conscience require when loyalty to one's country collides with a system that denies justice? His story challenges us to examine how loyalty, dissent, and democratic participation intersect in moments of national tension.

We also look to local histories shaped by the Chicano Movement in San Jose, including the example of **Yolanda Pérez**, who as a middle school student participated in school walkouts protesting inequitable educational policies. Her story reminds us that movements are not sustained by high-profile leaders alone. They are carried forward by young people who are willing to question unfair systems and to risk consequences to demand dignity and access.

The legacy of **A. P. Giannini**, founder of Bank of America and son of Italian immigrants, offers another perspective on belonging. Giannini's commitment to extending credit to working-class and immigrant communities in the aftermath of the 1906 earthquake reshaped California's economic landscape. His story underscores how inclusion in finance, education, and civic life can expand opportunity, not just for one group, but for society as a whole.

We are equally honored to draw upon the work of former De Anza instructor and CHCF board member, **Cozetta Guinn**, an artist and educator whose work illuminated African American art and experiences in our local region. We highlight the extraordinary life of **Betty Reid Soskin**, the nation's oldest park ranger and a tireless public historian who devoted her life to ensuring that the stories of Black Americans during World War II were fully told. She understood that historical interpretation is not neutral, as it shapes how communities understand who belongs and whose contributions count.

Literature, too, plays a vital role in expanding belonging. Excerpts from **Rodolfo Gonzales**'s "I Am Joaquín" and the enduring words of **Langston Hughes** invite us to confront the gap between America's ideals and its realities. These writers do not reject the promise of democracy; they challenge it to grow.

As we prepared this event, many students expressed their feelings of uncertainty and, at times, fear, along with cautious hope. Some described a sense that we are living in an important and transitional chapter of history. For many of our students who are immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants, the question of belonging is not theoretical. It is personal and immediate. What borders, visible or invisible, shape their opportunities? Who defines belonging in their communities? How does one generation's courage create space for another's?

At the California History Center, we are especially interested in the intergenerational dimension of these questions. Movements are not sustained by nostalgia alone. They endure through participation and continual commitment.

Our event will feature student art responding to the question "What does belonging feel like to you?" and poetry asking "What do freedom and belonging mean in your lived experience?" These creative works remind us that belonging is not merely a legal category or a political debate. It is an emotional and relational experience that is felt in classrooms, workplaces, neighborhoods, and families.

We do not gather to offer easy answers. Instead, we create space for thoughtful engagement. What stories have shaped your understanding of who belongs? What singular narratives need expanding? And what movements—large or small—are unfolding around us now?

California's history teaches us that democracy is not static. It expands when people insist on fuller stories and wider circles of inclusion. The story of belonging is never finished. It grows each time someone crosses a border of geography, assumption, or fear, and invites others into a broader vision of community. We hope you will join us in continuing that work.

Audrey Edna Butcher Civil Liberties Education Initiative

As I read of frightening accounts of family members being abducted by ICE agents and fathers perishing in confinement sites far away from their children, I am reminded of a story we published in the August 2018 issue of the Californian told by a friend of mine who lost his own father when he was quite young. Jiro Saito's father was an immigrant who was labeled an "enemy alien" during World War II, taken away by FBI agents and held in a secret prison site where he died from lack of proper medical care. No evidence of a judicial hearing citing charges against Jiro's father was provided to his family. In the history of our country, whenever scapegoating and hate are of use to those in power, treating immigrants as lesser and without rights under the Constitution becomes common practice. May Jiro's plea be heeded now.

Civil liberties are currently on the minds of many,and how can it be otherwise,given the historical debates and battles raging over dramatic efforts to shape and change the direction of our nation? Will we redefine who can be an "American," who truly belongs here, and whether some people in our nation may have rights and liberties while others may not? These are critical issues with tremendous implications for the future of democracy in the U.S. – Tom Izu

Tom Izu

"Otay Kairi, Otay Kairi"

by Jiro Saito

I was a little more than two years old when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor, and almost three when our family was taken from our farm in Otay, California, which is near San Diego, to Santa Anita Racetrack. My remembrance of that time is largely the remembrances of my mother and sister, and tonight I would like to tell you their story and mine.

By the time I was born in 1939, my father and mother had operated a farm for seven years. Only ten of its forty acres was arable. Papa had been a fisherman and decided that farming would be a better way to earn enough money to move the entire family back to Japan. That was his plan. I had four sisters and a brother and was the youngest by eleven years, so I may have not been planned.

Mama helped out in the fields but her main job, along with Kanta no Obasan, our great aunt, was to do the cooking and cleaning of our home. Mama told me that once in awhile, when she was home while everyone was out working, Mexicans, who had crossed the border, would come by and she would make them sandwiches to take with them on their journeys northward.

My sister Yoshiko, who we called Yottan, said that on December 7, she was stoking our family's Ofuro or hot tub when one of the farm workers came by to tell her that Japan had bombed Pearl Harbor. She didn't know where Pearl Harbor was and told Papa and Mama what she had heard. She did not remember what their reaction was to the news but guessed that they must have been in shock and worried about my two sisters and brother who had left for Japan in 1940 to finish their education.

As Japanese men were being taken into custody, Papa had a feeling that his turn would be soon. Yottan said that he had packed a small suitcase to be ready to go when the FBI came to pick him up. Yottan came home from school one day in late December and Mama told her that the FBI had come to take Papa away. They had also confiscated our family's Butsudan, a small Buddhist shrine many families kept at home.

Yottan could not understand why my father had been arrested. He was neither a Buddhist priest, nor a Japanese language teacher, nor a community leader. The only reason she could think of was that Papa had grown children, who happened to be American citizens, living in Japan. The day arrived when our family had to leave the farm. Papa, while at the detention camp in Los Angeles County, had told Yottan, through a barbed wire fence, that she would be responsible for selling what she could. So at the age of 15, she had to sell farm equipment that went at bargain prices and a year-old truck that sold for $50.00 The things we couldn't store or sell would be left behind for anyone to take, like my red tricycle.

An army truck came and took us to Santa Anita Assembly Center in L.A. County around a month later than other families in San Diego. My sister Itsuko had contracted measles and our family had been quarantined. Because of her illness and the delay it caused, we had the truck to ourselves for the journey to Santa Anita. As we were leaving our farm the truck stopped. One of the soldiers got out and in a few moments he returned to the truck. He handed me my red tricycle.

At Santa Anita we lived in horse stalls whose thin walls did not allow privacy. Yottan told me that my mother would have to carry me away from the stalls at night because I would constantly cry, "Otay kairi, Otay kairi," "I want to go home to Otay, I want to go home to Otay." I never knew what Mama

continued on page 20

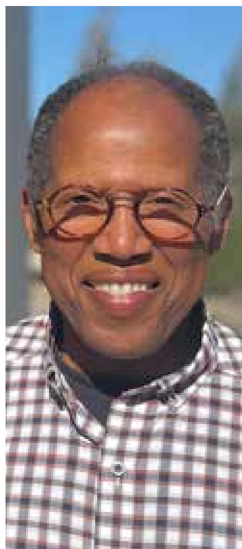
"Equal rights, fair play, justice, are all like the air: we all have it, or none of us has it. That is the truth of it."

– Maya Angelou

The Life and Times of Biddy Mason

PART ONE

by Jerry Grayson



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jerry Grayson has enjoyed a wide-ranging set of careers. Educated in newspaper journalism, he worked in broadcast news for 16 years, then became an education video producer, followed by a stint in non-profit education technology provision and, for the past 23 years, has devoted his energy to healthcare software systems. His article for our magazine this quarter, in some respects, takes him back to that early print training and his deep interest in history.

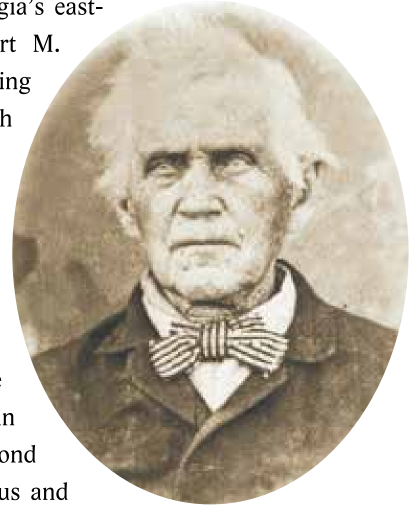
What did Biddy think—how could she have felt—as her master, Robert Mays Smith, passed word his Mississippi household would move west to a place called the Utah Territory? The household included nine slaves. Biddy, one of that nine born into bondage, would have become somewhat accustomed to (and that's not to suggest accepting of) an existence filled with forced labor, violence and its ever-present threat, powerlessness, uncertainty, oppression, belittlement and vulnerability for an enslaved Black woman. In spite of that stifling, repressive world, her life's course included finding ways to empower herself as much as was allowed; Biddy may have wondered in Smith's announcement what other opportunities, no matter how seemingly small, would reveal themselves to her with this journey to yet another place unknown. Even if she'd heard

the name California, she certainly couldn't have known she'd wind up there—not stay in Utah—just three years after both places passed from Mexican to United States control and, most importantly, just one year after California became a U.S. state. And she had absolutely no reason at first to believe, or even hope or consider, in spite of California's myriad 19th century complications and tacit slavery tolerance, that she would not only be there but eventually be freed by its laws, be valued and sought out for her abilities, and ultimately, be more than prosperous. Neither the emergence of a new religion born in America, nor the country's war with a neighbor, nor America's westward expansion was fully within her reckoning—no hint how they could affect her, change the course of her life. They all would. All she could know for certain in heading to what Smith sometimes referred to as "Deseret" was that she would soon, again, be on the move by command.

The year was 1847. Robert Mays Smith (also referred to as Robert Marion Smith by some sources—this article will use Robert M. Smith, Robert Smith, or simply Smith) was a recent (mid-1840s) convert to the still-fairly-new Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormons. Smith's new religious practice was unlikely to have endeared him to many in Mississippi; some there, and across the pre-Civil War U.S., expressed open hostility to Mormons. Also informing Smith's decision to move was the call to an expanding flock by Brigham Young, the church's new leader, to migrate to the Great Salt Lake Valley. Young envisioned his congregants and converts populating a haven, a promised land he foresaw ultimately as "the State of Deseret" where immigrants put down "Stakes of Zion."[1,2] Robert M. Smith's new faith needed him to act, to establish his own stake in the new land, to answer Young's call. The household would go west beginning early in 1848.[3] In her own way Biddy, a chattel slave, became a pioneer, a frontierswoman.

Born simply Bridget (generally, American slaves did not get surnames) Biddy's life began in Hancock County, Georgia, in 1818.[4] Probably. Hancock County of the early 19th century symbolized the well-established, expanding economic significance of cotton in the South; fields of bolls bursting with fluffy white fiber, tended and picked by seeming armies of Black slave labor.[5] Biddy was the newborn daughter of such labor, soon separated from her mother, maybe just after birth, maybe as a toddler. A young Biddy would be raised by, nurtured by and learn from the slaves around her, from the older enslaved women in particular. Over time she grew proficient in herbal remedies, in cooking, in large animal herding and husbandry, in nursing the sick back to health and in childbirth.[6] She proved a solid study, and a quick one, and Biddy's midwife and nursing skills became vital in helping transform the lives of others, and her own.

Available information suggests Biddy spent her earliest years on one or two plantations in Georgia's east-central hills.[7] Biddy's life before Robert M. Smith remains today the subject of conflicting narratives: she was a wedding gift to Smith when he married Rebecca Dorn in South Carolina in 1830; she was in the settlement of Smith's father-in-law's estate in 1847; she was sold away to Mississippi before 1830 and was gifted to Smith by an in-law or a prosperous Mormon in the 1840s. The first telling is tenuous because Smith accounts for no slaveholdings in the 1840 Mississippi census.[8] The second narrative is weakened by that 1840 census and by the estate settlement notation of other slaves who would go with Smith from Mississippi to Utah to California; Biddy not listed in that settlement.[9] The third possibility is also unsupported by evidence but plausible.



Robert M. Smith, c. 1880 and Rebecca Ruth Dorn Smith, undated. Credit: FamilySearch

Biddy's formative years (1825 - 1840) came in the slave labor-intensive heyday of the ante-bellum South's King Cotton period. Southeast Georgia (Hancock County) and neighboring western South Carolina (Smith's home region, the Edgefield District) were early adopters of Eli Whitney's newly-invented cotton gin for crop processing.[10] Smith, still a young man, was himself seemingly chasing a life among the cotton elite, reaching for membership in what many popularly knew as "the Cottonocracy."[11]

Robert Smith had, according to a descendant, married up.[12] He came of age the product of a relatively poor immediate family, while Rebecca Dorn's upbringing benefited from the resources of a father with a fairly large South Carolina plantation. Rebecca's paternal grandparents immigrated to colonial South Carolina from Germany in 1765, more than a decade before the American Revolution.[13] According to the descendant, as a young girl Rebecca possessed her own slave girl—evidence points to this slave being Hannah, one of the 13 freed alongside Biddy in Los Angeles in 1856.[9, 14]

Cotton pickers and an overseer on a Mississippi plantation, c. 1850. Credit: Library of Congress, Public Domain

The cotton industry Smith had grown up with in South Carolina was continuing an expansion which brought numerous migrating planters to richer soils in less-populated areas west of the original southern American colonies.

Rebecca Dorn's marriage may not have secured a man at the station Rebecca's parents envisioned, but Smith apparently presented an ambitious, striving figure. He also benefited from a modest $150 bequest (about $5,500 today) from his grandfather, giving him at least a grubstake of his own.[15] The need to prove himself, without help from the Dorns or others, may have partly prompted Smith's decision to move from South Carolina to Mississippi in 1830.

The newly-wed Smiths seem to have settled first near Logtown, in Mississippi's Hancock County, about 50 miles northeast of New Orleans, Louisiana. Smith remained restless—would not stay put. Records show Smith purchased 75 acres of land in Franklin County, east of Natchez, Mississippi, in 1841.[16] Natchez is roughly 200 miles northwest of Logtown. The cotton industry Smith had grown up with in South Carolina was continuing an expansion which brought numerous migrating planters to richer soils in less-populated areas west of the original southern American colonies.[17] The commercial boom may have presented Smith more opportunity but brought no material benefits for Biddy, still in bondage, still under threat of the lash, subject to the whims, moods and needs of her masters and overseers, and at risk of being uprooted from the other enslaved people who'd become the closest she had to family.

In 1838, Biddy, a young woman of about 20, gave birth for the first time. Her daughter Ellen would in later decades cite her place and year of birth as Logtown, 1838.[18] The record is not clear that Smith was Biddy's master at that point, and no evidence exists as to Ellen's father. This lack of paternal assignment was true of many children born to the enslaved, and the occurrence of slave offspring fathered by their masters and overseers is well documented, a reality commented on contemporaneously in the Civil War diaries of Mary Boykin Chestnut, wife of a former U.S. Senator turned Confederate officer. She wrote:

> *"This only I see. Like the patriarchs of old our men live all in one house with their wives and their concubines, and the mulattoes one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children—and every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody's household, but those in her own she seems to think drop from the clouds, or pretends so to think."*[19]

Ellen's paternity seems to follow this precipitation pattern. Smith's attestation in the 1840 Mississippi census, if completed truthfully, dismisses his parenthood.

(NOTE: Biddy's true age also remains unreconciled. While her family recognizes August 15, 1818 as her birthdate, the 1850 Utah Territory census displaying detail of Robert M. Smith's "Slave Schedule" lists Biddy as a 25-year-old with a racial description of her as "Black." The next line of that schedule shows Ellen as 11 years old, and a "Mulatto."[20] If the schedule is fully accurate, Biddy bore Ellen at about age 14, but this record of Biddy's age is an outlier.)

Biddy's motherhood in Mississippi expanded in 1842 with a second daughter, Ann. The young woman shouldered child-rearing alongside the demands, burdens and lack of autonomy produced by enslavement. If she thought of freedom, it may still have seemed a very distant dream. At this point, however, it could be expected that Biddy's acquisition of skills and knowledge, especially in herbal remedies, in caring for the sick, and in midwifery, would be reaching notable levels of proficiency if not already fully formed. The ability to heal others and to more safely manage childbirth in the early-to-mid 19th century, especially away from population centers, was not common; medicine had not yet attained what 200 years later can be thought of as its scientific basis.[21] A contemporary practitioner might readily declare that someone needing care had an imbalance of body humors and prescribe bleeding and purging the patient, even applying leeches.[22] This ran counter to Biddy's application of healthcare and her practices would ultimately unite her with a university-trained physician who was among the first in California.[23]

Winding back to 1830, as Robert M. Smith readied his move from South Carolina to Mississippi, another force in Biddy's future also took shape. That force would first touch Robert Smith.

In April, 1830, in western New York State, Joseph

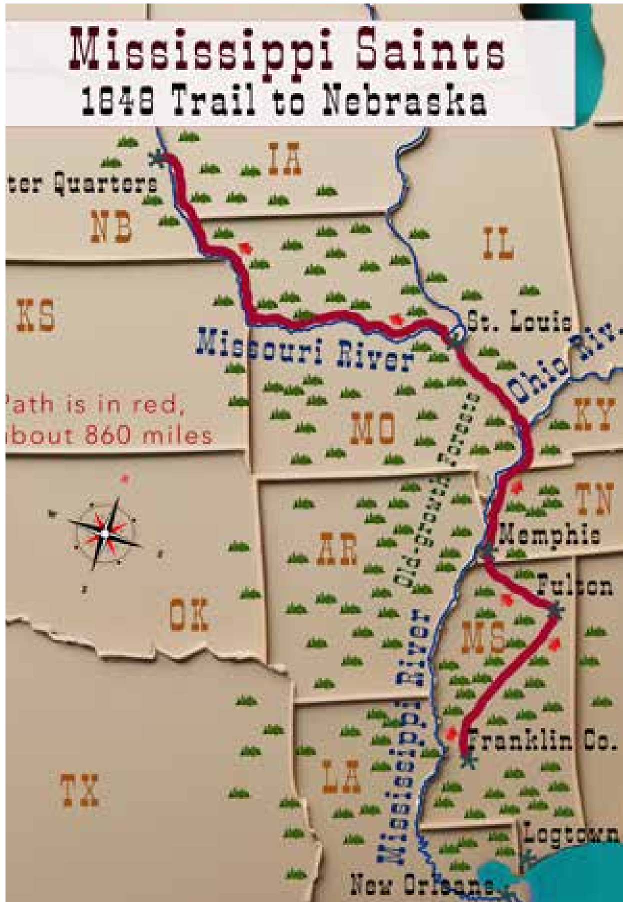
Smith (no relation to Robert Smith) founded a new religion originally named the Church of Christ.[24] Today we know it as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Mormons. A year after the church's New York State start, and triggered by Joseph Smith's vision of building a place for the righteous—a "Zion"—the new denomination's central church was established in Ohio, with another, significant presence in Jackson County, Missouri.[25] But as the Latter-day Saints (LDS) faith grew in that first decade, it also encountered strong and sometimes violent opposition. Missouri's governor declared the need for the church's expulsion or extermination. Most Mormons were driven out of Missouri.[26]

The LDS Ohio center also met resistance; Joseph Smith stood accused of financial fraud and of conspiring to have a critic murdered.[27] These and other events led to substantial Mormon relocation to western Illinois along the Mississippi River in the small village of Commerce, where Smith purchased land, renamed the settlement "Nauvoo," became mayor, and established a high degree of autonomy for the community. The influx of Mormons in Nauvoo in the early 1840s turned it into Illinois's second largest population center at the time—even purportedly greater at one point than the approximately 4,000 headcount of 1840s Chicago.[28] In Illinois, Joseph Smith's church and its practices would again, and fairly soon, find negative sentiment building and legal entanglements mounting, to the point that Smith needed to surrender to Illinois authorities. Smith had established martial law in Nauvoo; the state accused him of treason. The leader of the still-fledgling church was arrested and locked up in Carthage, IL. In 1844 a mob overran the jail housing Joseph Smith and killed him.[29]

Smith's death prompted a succession struggle eventually won by Brigham Young, a 43-year-old who'd spent his early adulthood as a religious seeker. Young had left the church in which he was raised but was unsettled in his spiritual course until, at 31, he met Joseph Smith in 1832. Twelve years later, with Smith killed at the hands of that Carthage mob, Young emerged from the church power struggle and assumed leadership, eventually becoming the Latter-day Saints's second president. After several more years of strife and confrontation with Illinois authorities and its citizens, and because of disdain for the U.S. government, Brigham Young determined to move his LDS flock much farther west, to the Salt Lake Valley, which was at that point still part of Mexico.[30] He settled on Utah's isolation though there was a cadre of LDS members recently (1846) arrived in Yerba Buena (San Francisco) with the leader of that group urging the Mormons to the Bay Area. That Mormon group's newspaper, one of the earliest in the state, helped touch off the California Gold Rush.[31]

About the same time as Young beckoned his congregants to Salt Lake (largely because the region was not under U.S. control) war was erupting between Mexico and the U.S. The U.S. victory in 1848 forced Mexico to cede what are now the present-day states of California, Utah, Nevada, much of Arizona, New Mexico and more.[32] This would somewhat change the dynamics for Brigham Young in the Utah Territory, but it would later be determinative for Biddy. California entered the Union in 1850 as a free state; slavery was illegal. The reality, however, wasn't nearly as straightforward. There was

Utah County, Utah Territory, 1850 Census, Slave Schedule. Credit: "Iron, Utah, United States records," images, FamilySearch.org



little enforcement of the free-state status and, paradoxically, one of the new legislature's decisions in 1852 was to pass a Fugitive Slave Law.[33] The environment was complicated. Even with Young ultimately alerting—or maybe warning—Biddy's master of the risks of taking slaves to California, the Mississippi Mormon convert Smith remained a man centered in his own counsel. But all of this was still in Biddy's future.

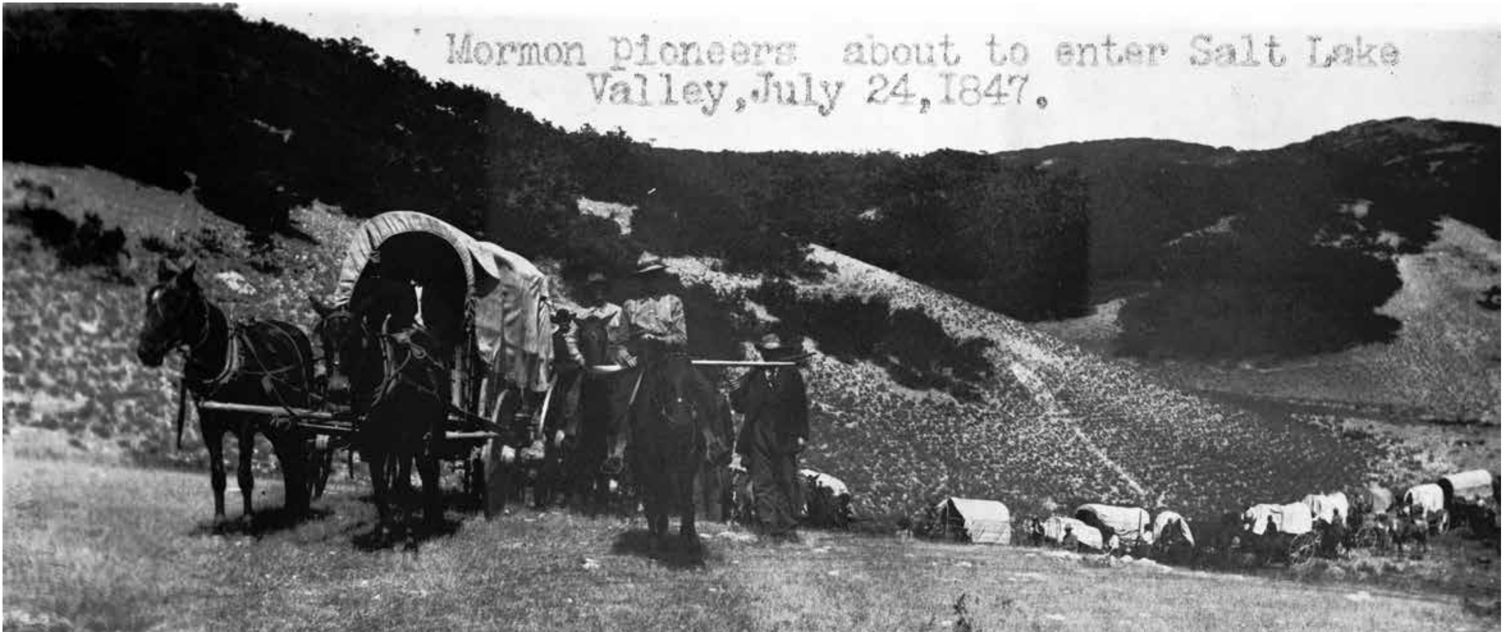
From their earliest days, the Mormons have exercised a rigorous devotion to mission, evangelizing, and gaining converts, and the practice would not brook boundaries.[34] That's how, in 1844, even as the upheaval in the Midwest sent the Latter-day Saints in a new direction in several respects, Mormon missionaries were busy proselytizing in Mississippi.[35] Robert M. Smith became one of the Latter-day Saints conversion successes. And in 1847 as Brigham Young persisted in urging Mormons to strike out for the "State of Deseret" Robert Smith, a man with a new spiritual home and seemingly still eager to prove himself, heeded the call.

The Smith household's 1848 move to Utah would be physically grueling for all, especially so for those in bondage. By now Biddy had given birth to a third girl, Harriet, an infant still nursing. As Biddy herded Smith's livestock on the move Harriet would be carried mainly on Biddy's back, her other girls in tow.[36, 37] Rebecca Smith's childhood slave, Hannah, mother to four children and pregnant with a fifth at the start of the long trek, would give birth to a baby girl—with Biddy midwifing—a bit more than a month into the journey.[38] (Rebecca Dorn would also give birth, Biddy likely attending.)

The Smith household's 1848 move to Utah would be physically grueling for all, especially so for those in bondage.

Smith's clan did not leave Mississippi alone but as part of a 150-wagon caravan headed north to Nebraska before Utah.[39] Brigham Young had designated a gathering point at Winter Quarters, Nebraska (present-day Omaha) from which the pilgrims would follow a known route to Deseret. Estimates put the journey for Smith and household at 1700 miles via the path taken.[40] While Smith, his family and overseers may have mainly ridden wagons, horses or mules, it is likely the slaves (by common 19th century convention) made the trip on foot—so too would some of the White settlers. As the journey approached Biddy had to have a strong sense of what it would be like; she'd trudged the approximately 600 miles from southeast Georgia (or maybe western South Carolina) to southern Mississippi. That had to include dirt trails—mainly old Native American trade and migration routes—and sometimes ill defined paths through mostly southern wilderness. Surely there were swamps, creeks and thick growth to navigate as she crossed the South.

The trip to Utah Territory would present the same, and



Mormon pioneers entering Salt Lake Valley, 1847. Credit: Library of Congress, Public Domain

more, for a woman with three children, including a nursing infant. The Mormon pioneer and guide John Brown described some of the journey in his diary.[41] Months of walking in a range of weather conditions—heat, pelting rain storms, gusting winds and blowing dust, with particular slow going through the mountains. They traipsed over plains, hills, navigated mountain passes, through forests and brush, fording streams and creeks, even crossed the Mississippi and Missouri rivers, and tramped through banks of mud, brush. Walking for much of the journey, with loads and livestock, it is unlikely their pace was much faster than about a mile an hour, a fact attested to by daily notations documented on a Mormon route map.[42] Biddy and other slaves were tasked with breaking camp each morning, cooking for the group, herding, and Biddy was called on to tend the sick, and to deliver babies—as noted, at least two born during the migration.[43]

Their departure from northeast Mississippi (Monroe County, an inconvenience from the Natchez area) on March 10, 1848, had the benefit of being in the second group of Mississippi Mormons traversing the continent's midsection to the Utah Territory. John Brown notes that this second group included "...56 white persons, 34 colored persons. Their possessions: 28 wagons, 41 yoke of oxen, 22 horses, 32 mules, 48 milch cows, and 100 sheep."[44] Two years earlier, 1846, the first caravan of Mississippi Saints would have taken a similar route as they followed Brown north to Nebraska, then westward to the Salt Lake Valley. The journey took that initial group from northeastern Mississippi to Memphis, Tennessee, where they then followed the east bank of the Mississippi, used boats to span the Ohio River, continued north, crossing the Mississippi River to the west bank in flatboats and ferries near Saint Louis, Missouri. The '46 Saints then followed the Missouri River, mainly overland, to the point where Council Bluffs, Iowa stands on the east side and Winter Quarters, Young's designated gathering point, sits west. In those first few years they were heeding the call by the hundreds (Robert Smith, with Biddy, was among those) and later by the thousands.[45, 46] That westward path through Nebraska and beyond, also predominately overland, would then arc across present-day Wyoming angling southwest into what is now Utah.[47]

Robert Smith's 1848 arrival in the Salt Lake Valley—a household of nine Whites, ten Blacks (Biddy, Hannah, and their eight children) three wagons (four when he left Mississippi according to John Brown), four oxen (two yokes), eight mules, seven cows and a horse—saw him establish a homestead in the Cottonwood area of what is now metro Salt Lake City.[48] Biddy looked around at a new and vastly different landscape, but her station remained. Her days would still have been consumed with cooking, cleaning, shepherding and tending the household's animals, clearing fields and planting when winter had passed. At this point she would also have been a major—even trusted—caregiver, using her herbal medicine knowledge and watching how her charges would and should respond. And Biddy would have become facile and confident in her ability to guide pregnant women, free and enslaved, through childbirth, having now done so in the sparest of conditions.

It was much like what Biddy had known in the South, but on a bit smaller scale. Her life in the Mormon community would be within the constraints of slavery suffused with what Brigham Young and Joseph Smith both referred to as

Robert Smith's 1848 arrival in the Salt Lake Valley–a household of nine Whites, ten Blacks, three wagons, four oxen, eight mules, seven cows and a horse–saw him establish a homestead in the Cottonwood area of what is now metro Salt Lake City.

the "Curse of Ham."[49] In the Bible's book of Genesis, Noah finds disfavor with his son Ham, so Noah decrees that Ham's son Canaan and Canaan's descendants will be "the servant of servants." Brigham Young was explicit in his embrace of slavery as a God-sanctioned practice:

> *"I will remark with regard to slavery, inasmuch as we believe in the Bible, inasmuch as we believe in the ordinances of God, in the Priesthood and order and decrees of God, we must believe in slavery. This colored race have been subjected to severe curses, which they have in their families and their classes and in their various capacities brought upon themselves. And until the curse is removed by Him who placed it upon them, they must suffer under its consequences; I am not authorized to remove it. I am a firm believer in slavery."*
> *– Mormon Prophet, LDS Church President, Governor of Utah Territory, Brigham Young on January 23, 1852, delivered to a territorial government assembly.*[50]

Her first winter in Utah had to seem nearly as brutal as her bondage; weeks of temperatures at or below freezing, sometimes below zero Fahrenheit. Biddy encountered snow drifts as tall as an adult, and winter winds that cut through layers of clothing.

Young's attitude notwithstanding, the Utah Territory did present change for Biddy. She was now in a place with a harsher environment, with less of the lush, deep greenery of Mississippi or other parts of the deep South. The party arrived in the valley in late September, 1848, just ahead of what has been recorded as a fierce, challenging winter.[51] It's possible that back in central Mississippi, or in Georgia, Biddy experienced an occasional and transient snowfall, with the snow melting away in days, even hours. Her first winter in Utah had to seem nearly as brutal as her bondage; weeks of temperatures at or below freezing, sometimes below zero Fahrenheit. Biddy encountered snow drifts as tall as an adult, and winter winds that cut through layers of clothing.[52]

Adding to the extreme, new kind of weather was a scarcity which grew by degrees as the days passed and the paucity rippled down the societal hierarchy. The enslaved were at the bottom of that structure, and the threat of starvation, coupled with the harsh climate, had to make simply staying alive a challenge.[53] The coming spring and summer of 1849 offered a limited respite. Biddy's first summer in Utah was unseasonably cold and wet, with even some freezing summer temperatures documented and confirmed in journals and later scientific research.[54] No matter the season, she was ringed in by soaring, majestic mountains in contrast to the gentle hills and flatlands she'd known in the South. Her slavery remained, but Biddy was clearly in the midst of change, of something new and different. Did those mountains serve as imposing barricades leaving her further trapped and without recourse, or did they, and the trip to get there, symbolize the scaling of new and challenging heights to a place where the air changed? We will likely never know, but we do know Biddy could be offered a concept and run with it.

The Mormon influx to Deseret also brought in at least a handful of free Blacks, most notably Jane Manning James and her husband Isaac. Jane and Isaac were both Mormon converts, both part of the 1847 migration and among the first Black Utah pioneers.[55] The 1850 census documents about 50 "colored" people (including Biddy, Hannah and their eight children) throughout the Utah Territory.[56] That number represents vastly fewer Blacks by both count and overall population percentage than Biddy would have been accustomed to in the South. (Blacks in many counties of the South often outnumbered Whites, then and now.) There's no evidence that Biddy actually knew Jane or Isaac James, but with the approximately 2,000 Mormons in the valley engaged in a highly communal existence, there's a good chance Biddy knew of the James family, and that they were free. Jane, the daughter of free Blacks in Connecticut, would give birth to what is recorded as the first Black child born in Utah in May, 1848, just a few months before Biddy's arrival with the Smith party.[57] For Biddy the midwife this would have (if known) been a seminal event. Certainly the presence of a Black infant in the Mormon congregation would have been a topic of awareness and some conversation for the community.

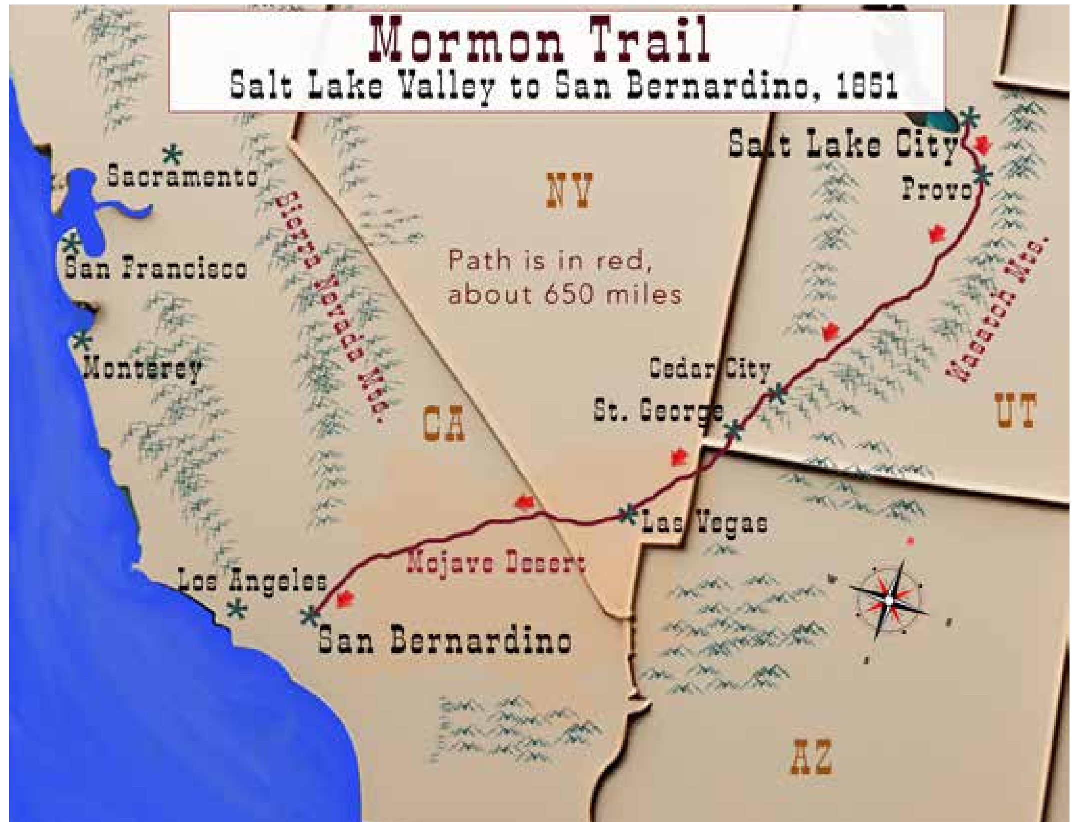
In 1851, a bit more than two years after settling in Utah, Robert Smith determined to move again, this time to the freshly-admitted state of California, a major U.S. prize in its Mexican-American War victory. Smith wasn't necessarily struggling, but he wasn't prosperous, either, and the LDS leader had issued another call. Brigham Young envisioned a new Mormon colony in the new state and he encouraged some

Why Not Migrate Mainly Via Rivers?

The LDS migration to the Great Salt Lake Valley in the 1840 did include some navigable waterways, such as use of a section of the Mississippi River by the 1848 Mississippi Saints. Primarily, however, the migrants stuck to overland travel for various reasons, including:

- Main rivers along their route, such as the Platte, were non-navigable
- The scale of the migration, with livestock feeding and fresh water needs, made river travel tenuous for sustaining life
- The scale, especially going against strong currents in some cases, also meant greater use of waterways would be expensive and slow

of his flock to settle the area of Rancho San Bernardino, but many more took him up on the suggestion than he'd expected.[58] Young also advised the slaveholders among those choosing to settle the new colony that California was a free state, that slaves might be set free once on California soil.[59] The ever-restless Smith also remained a risk-taker so, unlike others answering the colonization call, he would take his slaves with him. Biddy endured yet another long trek, again with steep mountains relentless on the horizon, broken by arid plateaus, sudden streams and blowing bramble and dust; they crossed the Mojave Desert just ahead of the height of summer. Without her knowing, Biddy was taking her last laboring steps toward a state of freedom.



Accounts of Smith's time in San Bernardino indicate he was attaining a level of success and status, the lack of which had initially driven him from South Carolina's Edgefield District. It's possible he was one of the wealthier settlers in California's new LDS colony. He'd been selected in that summer of 1851 to the colony's first High Council, a post with judicial and financial sway, and he'd set up a cattle ranch apart from much of the rest of the Mormon colony on the Santa Ana River, but on land they seemed to jointly claim. This would prove problematic.[60] Biddy's world expanded, too, in new and likely breathtaking ways. If she'd known free blacks in South Carolina or Mississippi, her interactions with them were likely cursory. Beginning in the Utah Territory (possibly with the James family) and with greater force in Southern California, Biddy came to know of Blacks with both freedom and station. One of them was Elizabeth Flake Rowan, another Mormon slave brought to San Bernardino, then set free when her owner moved back to Utah. Of significant note was Robert Owens who had worked his way up to a thriving livery stable business in still small Los Angeles with customers throughout the basin and east to San Bernardino.[61] It's

Left: Artist rendering, Mormon fort in San Bernardino, c. 1852. Credit: San Bernardino Historical & Pioneer Society and City of San Bernardino

Below: 1852 drawing of San Bernardino. Credit: Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection

Biddy's Timeline to Freedom

1818 Biddy's birth in Georgia, 15 August

1830
- Robert M. Smith, 26, inherits $150 from grandfather
- Smith marries Rebecca Dorn, moves from South Carolina to Logtown, Mississippi

1838 Biddy gives birth to Ellen in Hancock County, Mississippi

1840 Smith reports no slaves in Mississippi census

1841 Smith buys land in, has moved to Franklin County, Mississippi

1842 Biddy gives birth to Ann in Mississippi

1844 Smith converts to LDS faith, now reports four slaves

1847
- Biddy gives birth to Harriet in Franklin County, Mississippi
- Smith buys Hannah (Rebecca's childhood slave, now an adult in South Carolina) in father-in-law's estate settlement

1848
- Smith, Biddy leave Mississippi in Mormon migration (March)
- Mississippi group arrives in Nebraska (June)
- Larger Mormon group with Biddy, Smith, Mississippians arrives in Salt Lake Valley, Utah Territory (September)

1851 Smith, Biddy, others leave Utah for San Bernardino

1855
- Smith begins move with Biddy, others to Texas
- Sheriffs, posse find Smith's travel group in Santa Monica Mountains (New Year's Eve)

1856 19 January, Judge Hayes frees Biddy, others from Smith, declares them "free forever"

not clear but likely, given Owens's livestock supply business, he had engagement with the burgeoning cattle rancher Robert Smith, Biddy's enslaver.

Owens presented his own striking story: a former Texas slave who seemingly brokered a work deal with his master to sell Owens's labor to others. Owens split those earnings with the master, saved enough to buy his freedom and drove an ox cart from Texas to California where he soon earned enough to free his wife and children in Texas.[62] His arrival in sleepy Los Angeles in or about 1850 was just as the state basked in its admission to the Union, with San Francisco, Sacramento and Monterey as major centers, and L.A. little more than a backwater. Some sources mark Owens's arrival a couple or three years later. Whatever the date, the man soon set to work, first doing odd jobs, then providing cut wood to the U.S. military. That expanded further to his livery stable and a solid business and personal reputation. He also purportedly took wild horses and mules brought up from the ranchos down the coast in San Diego County, tamed them, then sold them to settlers. Whatever the scope, business was brisk and Owens—with a crew of at least ten hired hands, all vaqueros—became successful, sought out, and over just a few years had attained as much influence and stature as a Black man, a former slave, might expect in his times and surroundings.[63] And Owens's son Charles had somewhere along the way met and taken a hankering to Biddy's Ellen, now 17. This was a crucial affinity.

The early 1850s were also good to and for Robert Smith, but Smith's fortunes would turn quickly, and dramatically. In 1855, about four years into his San Bernardino settlement, Smith ran into difficulties apparently because the land he was working was not his alone and he was forced off it by an LDS majority—a financial and prestige blow to Smith. The ensuing acrimony prompted an estrangement from people in the spiritual home he'd known through eleven years and thousands of migration miles.[64] All had gone south. It's also believed Smith grew more anxious about keeping slaves in a free state. An incident documented in the "Alta California" newspaper in April, 1853, where a White man attempted but failed to have a free Black girl arrested as a fugitive slave may have given Smith pause; the state's legal process could sometimes work for Blacks which meant his slaveholding was at risk more than he'd initially reckoned.[65] The confluence of bad blood, financial loss and slaveholding peril locally seem to have convinced Smith it was time to take his estate and "slaves" to Texas.

Through the early 1850s, Biddy and the others bound to Smith in San Bernardino saw little change in their day-to-day circumstances; nothing of real consequence, though it seems from court narratives that Smith may have asserted a slightly more relaxed dominance. The enslaved had also now been exposed to Owens, Flake, and other free Blacks. Further, Biddy's enslaved cohort had traveled thousands of miles to locales vastly different from their origins, and that travel may have broadened their minds as much as it can anyone's. The improbable—lives of their own—became thinkable, even possible; but by what means? The State of California as a governing entity was in no rush to be truly "free" or to become an active advocate and champion. The society's dominant classes and even most in the middle of the hierarchy largely had no objection to the status quo ante. The free Blacks encouraged freedom but, alone, lacked the power to make it happen. It seems, however, that one of them may have, at least through leverage, if not outright. Still, as Robert Smith made

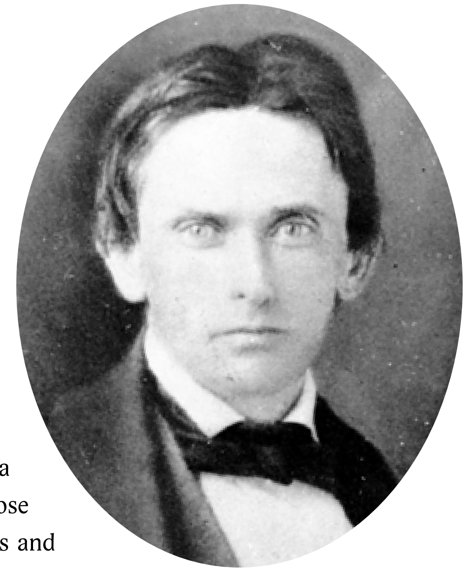
plans to move to Texas and began putting them into action, Biddy, her girls, and the others in bondage seemed resigned to being once more on the march, now back to the slave-holding South. The Texas move began in late December, 1855.

Word that Smith had pulled up stakes in San Bernardino eventually got to Elizabeth Flake and to Robert Owens and his son Charles who'd expressed his fondness for Ellen.[66] The man with leverage would act.

Robert Owens, as noted, had become a contributor in the small but rapidly growing Los Angeles community. He'd provided needed resources, helped other settlers carve out a homestead; many had begun to thrive, and the city's population had more than doubled in just a few years. So when Owens apparently went to Los Angeles County Sheriff David Alexander with news of the Smith household's departure, the sheriff conferred with San Bernardino County Sheriff Robert Clift, and together they sought a writ of habeas corpus from State District Court Judge Benjamin Hayes against Smith. The judge approved. With their newly-obtained legal papers, Alexander, Clift, Owens and a posse of Owens's vaqueros picked up the trail of the itinerant household and found the group in the midst of the Santa Monica Mountains on December 31, 1855.[67]

The Los Angeles Star of January 5, 1856, noted that the prior week had brought "cool, frosty weather, and in some localities ice" as much as an inch thick. So, when the lawmen and their posse came upon Smith's group in the mountains that New Year's Eve night, it's likely Biddy and her girls, maybe others, were huddled together, shivering, just trying to keep warm. Smith was served the order to appear in court for illegally holding enslaved people in California. Biddy, Hannah, their children and a grandchild—thirteen slaves total with another on the way for Hannah—were freed of Smith and placed in protective custody by the Los Angeles County sheriff.[68] The hearing to determine their status would also go before Judge Hayes.

The Honorable Benjamin Ignatius Hayes personified the 19th century circuit judge, making his district rounds by horseback, by carriage and by taking a steamer up and down the coast to hear cases in Los Angeles, San Diego and San Bernardino counties. He was the region's first state district court judge and seems, from documentation of his observations in the case, to have been a jurist making findings based on the law (the five-year-old California Constitution and its statutes), with those rulings deeply infused with the ideals and guiding principles of America's founding and of the Enlightenment.[69]



Benjamin Ignatius Hayes, future circuit judge, California First District Court (Los Angeles, San Bernardino and San Diego counties) at about age 34, six years before the freedom hearing. Credit: Security Pacific Collection, Los Angeles Public Library

Hayes, a native of Maryland, was himself a "49er" of a sort, setting out for California in 1849 but headed south, not north, to the gold rush. His biographers note that he made the trek from Independence, Missouri to California riding one mule and leading another packed with trip supplies. In April, 1850, he was elected the first county attorney for L.A., with election to his district court judgeship in 1852.[70] Biddy had been in the state less than a year at that point, still in servitude to the master who'd maybe received her as a wedding gift more than two decades earlier. The first weeks of 1856 dramatically altered that master-slave dynamic; Biddy became a principal

Los Ángeles City Hall and jail, with private businesses, 1860. Credit: USC Digital Library and California Historical Society

Los Ángeles Plaza, mission on the left. Credit: UCLA Library Digital Collections

petitioner, a legal stakeholder, against Robert M. Smith, with her liberty at stake. Judge Hayes would hear the details of and rule on the landmark California case we now refer to as Mason v. Smith. (Biddy had no last name at the time, as is borne out in the court record.)

The earliest days of 1856 may have brought Biddy the ultimate irony: behind bars but living an unaccustomed freedom. She had none of the daily chores. There were no cattle, crops, or ailing Smiths to attend. She wasn't suddenly being summoned for an issue, a dressing down, or worse. Rather than her waiting on others, someone brought her and her girls their meals, no matter how modest. It was an existence unknown to her and perhaps surreal. Still, there hung the question of what she would do when, as she was likely informed, her status with Robert Smith would be determined in court largely by what she might say about it. Biddy had only ever known the slave-master relationship, and that alone could have instilled a limited sense of the possible. Being constantly cowed, even subtly, can lead to a restricting psychology and a narrow range of the possible. As Englishwoman Frances Anne Kemble wrote in her Georgia plantation journal of 1838-39:

The earliest days of 1856 may have brought Biddy the ultimate irony: behind bars but living an unaccustomed freedom.

> *"Imagination shrinks from the possible result of such a state of things. Scorn, derision, insult, menace—the handcuff, the lash—the tearing away of children from parents, of husbands from wives, the labor of the body, the despair of mind, the sickness of heart."*[71]

But travel, people, and time would chip away at this bound state of being for Biddy, and to a seemingly lesser degree for Hannah. The nearly eight years since Mississippi had to give them a new sense of their world. A healthy mix of courage and truth, even understated, might break their bindings further. Would Biddy speak against Smith? Would she get the chance?

On Saturday, January 19, 1856, in the modest Los Angeles County courthouse, Biddy's life changed. She and her children (Ellen, Ann and Harriet) all sat in attendance. Six of the children and one grandchild of the other principal petitioner, Hannah, were also there, but Hannah was absent due to recovery from childbirth; it seems she was at Smith's residence in San Bernardino County. (It is worth keeping in mind her relationship with Rebecca Smith, which extended back to childhood.) Also missing were Hannah's sons Lawrence, said to be tending her, and Charles, still apparently also in San Bernardino County, but apparently not with Hannah. The newborn had come into the world two weeks earlier, and it was agreed Hannah and the baby were better off not recovering in a jail cell.[72]

In the hearing, Judge Hayes moved first through the nature of the habeas corpus writ; Biddy, Hannah, and their children and a grandchild were being held against their will, held in servitude. The counterargument from Robert Smith was that, yes, he had been their master in Mississippi, that they had consented to leave the South with him, and that he had supported them ever since. In his own telling Smith was now their de facto guardian and protector. The judge noted that Smith said he was "subjecting them to no more control than his own children." Smith's counsel apparently advised him not to argue continued ownership since that immediately ran counter to California statutes; better he be the patriarch of the extended Smith clan. Judge Hayes noted his skepticism, that

Smith, "in some vague manner" had "styled a guardianship."

The petitioners (Biddy and Hannah) had secured legal representation, but that would prove tenuous, at best. The judge's record does not reflect whether that lawyer was effective or even in court that day. There was also the matter of Biddy, a person of color, being prohibited by California law to testify in open court. To navigate that obstacle, the judge took Biddy into his chambers and he brought in "two disinterested gentlemen" of the community as witnesses. In chambers, Biddy made herself clear: "I have always done what I am told to do; I have always feared this trip to Texas since I first heard of it. Mr. Smith told me I would be as free in Texas as here." For the judge it was a telling construction. The judge conducted a separate interview of Hannah's 17-year-old daughter Ann, who asked Judge Hayes "will I be as free in Texas as here?," essentially corroborating Biddy's telling of Smith's assurances. Together they'd revealed to the judge the machinations of Smith, with Hayes noting: "And if ever so little bent by persuasion—the force of a feather was able to do the rest."

While Biddy's and Ann's statements suggested the San Bernardino period was a less stringent regime than had been the case in Mississippi or in Deseret (with new, small liberties afforded and perhaps reduced workloads) a move to Texas, back to slave country in a state that by law did not allow Blacks to enter as free, was almost certain to prompt a reversion. Judge Hayes was clear on this.

At this point the judge had already stepped through most of his fact-finding intended to clearly define the legal relationship between Biddy, Hannah and their offspring on one side, and Smith on the other. Hayes early and easily dismissed the prospect of ownership as absolutely counter to California law (though the law's application was less than merely uneven). While Smith's guardian claim could have some merit, the judge was inclined that "nature" (parentage) was the stronger determinant for the children, and that as adults neither Biddy nor Hannah needed a guardian. With the children now lined up under their mothers rather than Smith, Hayes turned to the determination of consent, of willingly traveling with Smith to Texas where once they crossed the state line any freedom was gone. It was apparent to the judge that Biddy did not consent and that she and her children should be legally severed from Smith, set clearly free. With Hannah indisposed in her post-natal recovery, and her daughter Ann presenting an unease aligned with Biddy's skepticism of Smith's promises, the judge mused over whether a mother (Hannah) would willingly lead herself and her children into continued and heightened bondage, but he then rejected this as a fate to which the children could be subjected no matter the mother's mindset. "If a woman," he wrote, "might deliberately surrender herself to slavery; she could not carry her offspring to that fate. It is the first grand thought of the Constitution—LIBERTY IS INALIENABLE!"

Judge Hayes, still keeping in sight the voluntary consent question, turned to what he considered "direct proof" against consent, the very writ of habeas corpus brought on behalf of Biddy and Hannah. He noted that Smith did nothing in court to rebut the writ; produced no evidence that the writ was filed against the women's wishes, attempted no dislodging of their sentiments in court, no testimony from his family or his neighbors. The lack of a counter from Smith was decisive.

In his ruling the judge declared "the said persons of color are entitled to their freedom, and are free and cannot be held in slavery or involuntary servitude, it is therefore argued that they are entitled to their freedom and are free forever."

Biddy's reaction to those words, "free forever," remains out of our grasp. Freedom entered her awareness decades earlier as a privileged concept, and she was no child of privilege. But in the fixed world she'd known, over time perhaps, came cracks in the fixture and a grudging inkling of the possible. Surely it increasingly came to her through the knowledge that other Blacks were at liberty, that the society about her was not just one thing, and that different people in different places had different ways. The vaguely possible could grow into more than hope, become more than possible. Maybe the judge's words felt to her the natural culmination of her journey, but maybe they still seemed unbelievable. Unfathomable. Maybe they left her shaking to her core with an unknown joy and self-determination, and as she walked out of court that January Saturday, the cool, Pacific air felt different. Fresher.

The case was not, however, closed. Judge Hayes still wanted and needed to hear from Hannah and ordered that she be brought to court Monday morning, January 21, her recovering health permitting. He left her children in Sheriff Alexander's special custody. To Biddy and her children he decreed "full liberty." His final declaration that Saturday encompassed all costs associated with the case up to that point and concluded those expenses "shall be paid by the said Robert Smith."

Sunday was not a day of rest for the judge. As he would document on Monday, his Sabbath would find him "pained by an occurrence not to be passed by unnoticed." The attorney

In his ruling the judge declared "the said persons of color are entitled to their freedom, and are free and cannot be held in slavery or involuntary servitude, it is therefore argued that they are entitled to their freedom and are free forever."

for Biddy and Hannah offered up to the judge a motion to dismiss and overturn Hayes's finding, to put Biddy back in Smith's control. The lawyer, through communication with Smith's counsel, claimed he was no longer authorized to prosecute the writ—that he had been discharged by Hannah and Biddy. He had not.

"The lawful liberty of the humblest dweller on our soil, is a thing too precious to be left the sport of every contingency in human affairs."

—Judge Benjamin Hayes

Judge Hayes knew far better than to take this turn at face value. He summoned and deposed Biddy and Hannah's attorney that day. The man allowed as how he'd been threatened for his representation of the writ, that he was told to abandon it, and that, when he agreed to do so, he was paid $100, roughly a bit less than $4,000 today. The attorney admitted he had not conveyed any of this to his formerly-enslaved clients. Hayes declined the attorney's withdrawal, noting that "no attorney can desert his clients at his own pleasure, without good reason therefor and fair notice to them." Both Smith and his attorney denied any part in these shenanigans; Judge Hayes maintained a reserve: "It is possible—yet strange, if possible—the defendant had nothing to do with (to say the least) an ill-advised stratagem to frustrate the writ of habeas corpus." The judge continued with wording inferring that this was an instance of people of "a degraded caste" perhaps justified in worse conduct IF this ploy was hatched by Smith and his lawyer. In a lawyerly way he'd made his opinion of both attorneys—and of Smith—clear.

Hannah remained in recovery that Monday—a no-show for court—but the judge had by that stage fully reasoned that "nothing else—except force—can account rationally for a favorable disposition in Hannah" with respect to her possible amenability to Smith's Texas plans. Hayes noted her as "a woman nearly white, whose children are all nearly so." He considered the prospect of her freely consenting to go back into slavery inexplicable. Hayes felt strongly that Hannah had wholeheartedly joined the writ but that she feared facing Robert Smith. As with the others he granted her full freedom.

In that Monday session Judge Hayes took the opportunity to speak not just of the law, and of the rights of Biddy, Hannah, et al., but also to offer a peek into how he saw the course of the country's growing divisions and its tortured relationship with the Declaration of Independence's promise of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."

> *"If we may turn aside," the judge wrote, "to contemplate the 'signs of the times,' and endeavor to foresee the destined course of agitations that shake the sacred altar of national liberty to its base — how long before stern necessities of the White race, unto the end of self-preservation, shall have forged heavier chains for the bondsmen of our country.... The lawful liberty of the humblest dweller on our soil, is a thing too precious to be left the sport of every contingency in human affairs."*

Hayes's ruling came down at a time when the issue of slavery dominated the nation's conversation. Two months after Hayes's order, both Biddy and Hannah would be name-checked in the then five-year-old New York Daily Times (now the New York Times) in an article entitled "Anti-Slavery in California."[73] Just five years later—with slavery central to the conflict in spite of today's persistent protestations otherwise—the U.S. Civil War would erupt.

The little girl born Bridget, who came to be known as Biddy by all who knew her, was now fully her own person. Her liberation came circuitously, thousands of miles and thirty-eight years removed from her birth. Biddy's first week free of Robert M. Smith's domination was experienced amid what the L.A. Star's weather summary described as days "pleasantly interspersed with sunshine and shower, and in a few weeks our famished stock will be amply provided with an abundance of good feed." Surely Biddy could feel her ambitious, nurturing spirit being fed, with new life sprouting all around her and within.

Freedom may have been a whisper and a phantasm among those who cared for Biddy in her earliest days, and a distant, fuzzy idea for her even later, but she'd been on a personal as well as a physical path, moving in the direction of her own freedom as soon as she began to learn. She'd never been taught to read or write, but she rose above with an innate intelligence and curiosity that moved her ahead and opened doors. And she would step through them. That January 1856 weekend in the Los Angeles courthouse would be a beginning. Biddy's true value would be borne out in the years still ahead—and even today.

Biddy Mason's life after January 1856 continued its remarkable course, touching thousands of Californians throughout the mid and late-1800s. Biddy became a significant force in Los Angeles real estate, a true icon in Golden State health care, a beacon for the destitute and disaster victims, and a wellspring for a new spiritual home. "The Life and Times of Biddy Mason, Part Two," in the Spring 2026 issue of *Californian*.

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Audrey Edna Butcher Civil Liberties Education Initiative

continued from page 5

was thinking during those days. Her husband was gone, three of her children were in Japan, she lad lost her home, and now had to put up with a crying boy who wanted to go home to Otay.

Yottan said that she was peeling a red radish in our living quarters at Santa Anita when we received a stack of telegrams from Lordsburg, New Mexico. It just so happened that the telegram on top told about my father's death in the Lordsburg camp. His heart had given out. My mother saw the stunned expression on Yottan's face and she asked her what had happened. Yottan said that to tell Mama that Papa had died was one of the hardest things she ever had to do. Even now, she told me, she recalls what she felt that day whenever she peels radishes.

My father's body was shipped from Lordsburg and his funeral took place at the Santa Anita Racetrack, at one of the smaller grandstands. I remember the close of the funeral when our family gathered around the casket. Mama was carrying me as she took me closer to the casket she whispered for me to say goodbye to my father. I don't remember if I said goodbye or was even sad looking at Papa for the last time. I believe that at most, I was confused over his lifelessness and about not going home.

A few years after the war ended and we had returned to San Diego from Poston, Arizona, we took a trip to Otay. The farm was under new ownership but looked the same, according to Mama. I remember when we left the property I could see the hills nearby covered with golden poppies. I returned to Otay again, but by then, Mama had passed away as had Kanta no Obasan. My sisters and brother had returned from Japan and had raised their families. I was married with my own family and lived in San Jose. The hills near our farm that had once been covered with golden poppies were now covered with homes. My life and the Otay that had been part of my childhood had both changed. But in hearing the calls for the expulsion of some immigrants and imagining the feelings of dread and anxiety of young people threatened to be sent away from the only country they have ever known, I'm reminded of what happened to Papa, Mama, and the rest of us in Otay, and I say to myself, let no child ever cry out as one did in 1942, "Otay kairi, Otay kairi."

__Jiro Saito__ is a San José resident who has chaired the Department of Asian American Studies at San José State University and worked on the campaign for redress for the WWII incarceration of Japanese Americans in a lifetime of varied occupations. He told his family's story to an assembly at the San José Japantown Buddhist Church on Day of Remembrance 2002 and again on May 3, 2018 at the Japanese American Museum, San José, at an event shared with Francisco Balderrama and others.

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At the Center

RECENT EVENTS

Archives in Action

Where Foothill-De Anza Students Discover, Connect, and Preserve History One Box at a Time

From left to right: Jessica Tran, Emma Acedillo, Ashmmir Wallace

Jess Tran, Emma Acedillo and Ash Wallace are Foothill students studying "History of the United States" with Prof. Bill Zeigenhorn this quarter. As part of their asynchronous course, they complete 10 hours of volunteer work at the California History Center through the Archive Volunteer Project, identifying and organizing primary sources first-hand. With the assistance of CHC librarian and archivist Lisa Christiansen, and assistant archivist Saroj Bangaru,they are working on post cards from Santa Clara County (1900-1915) and *The Whole Earth Catalog (1968-1970)*. "Every time I look at the post card there's something new. It's like piecing a puzzle together" say Jess and Ash. Emma is completely amazed at the amount of detail that went into creating *The Whole Earth Catalog* giving her a snapshot of the 1960's.

Ashley Sanchez, Exhibits Assistant, Humanities Scholars Work Experience Intern, Fall 25–Winter 26, is working on our upcoming exhibit "A Taste of History: Movements Without Borders: Expanding the Story of Belonging" Saturday, March 21, 4-7 p.m.

Johanna Cheng, a political science student at De Anza College, took "Grassroots Democracy: Leadership and Power" with Professor Cynthia Kaufman in Fall 2025. Her interest in California History and grassroots community movements brought her to CHC and she began volunteering after consulting with Lisa Christiansen, our librarian and archivist. Her project

Johanna Cheng, CHC Volunteer, Winter Quarter 2026

examines the private papers of Betty Peck, focusing on Peck's role in establishing the Saratoga Community Garden and integrating nature-based learning into her elementary classrooms. Johanna is especially interested in 1970s environmental awareness and the philosophy of the community garden movement and hopes to develop this research into a full-length paper.

At the Center

RECENT EVENTS

The California History Center houses private papers, books, photographs, pamphlets, student research papers, slides, newspapers, digitized video and audio tapes. CHC welcomes all students and members of the community to explore California History at: www.deanza.edu/califhistory/library-archives-research.

Yansy Ngai joined the California History Center as a Humanities Scholars Work Experience student in Winter 2025, where she helped sort and shelve books and organize administrative records. Since Spring 2025, she has continued as a dedicated volunteer, creating catalog records for archival boxes. She enjoys contributing to the organization of CHC and finds the work especially rewarding. While processing a box related to Barton's Pharmacy in Oakland (1915–1918), she began exploring a broader question: How were prescriptions filled in early twentieth-century California? As a STEM student at De Anza College, Yansy says her volunteer experience has "widened her perspective," and she encourages other students to get involved, reminding them that you don't have to be a Humanities scholar to volunteer at CHC.

Yansy Ngai, De Anza student volunteer since Spring 2025

Rama Haileselassie, Student Volunteer

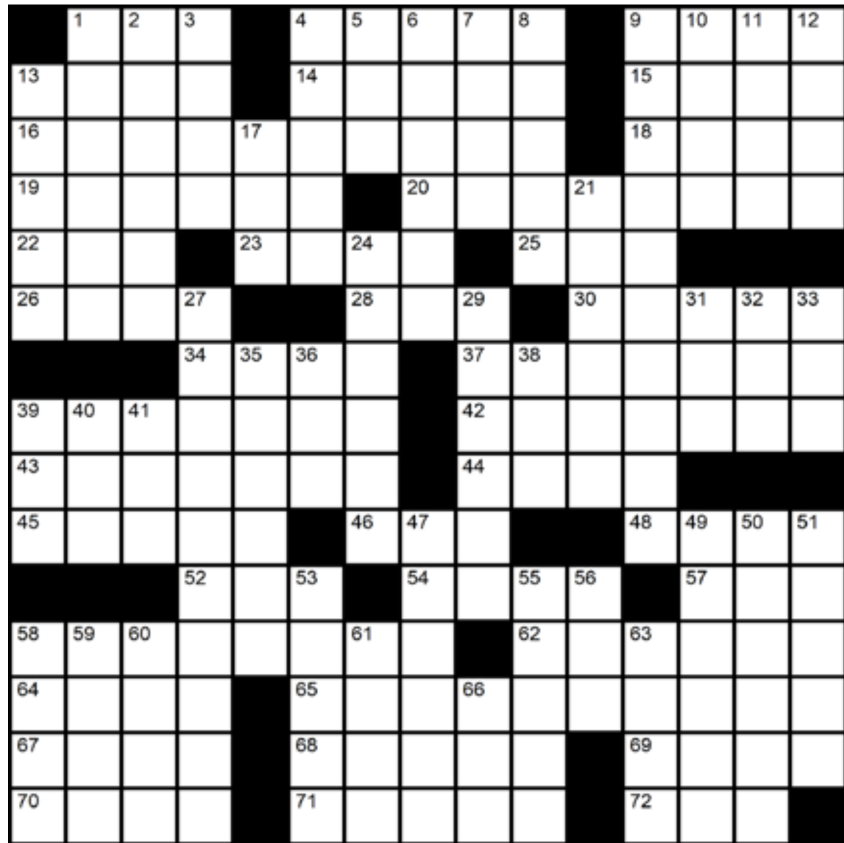
Rama Haileselassie, a De Anza student, began volunteering at California History Center in January 2025 after writing to CHC Faculty Director, Dr. Lori Clinchard. After a year as a volunteer at CHC, she is considering a career as an archivist or a conservationist. Creating catalog records and working with primary source materials have given her firsthand experience in preserving and organizing history, deepening her appreciation for California history and the stories these records hold.

Student staff member Anya Nazarova assists CHC Faculty Director, Lori Clinchard and the CHC team with administrative, technical, and graphic tasks, and is helping to prepare for the 17th annual "A Taste of History" event in March to ensure smooth event planning.

About the puzzle, opposite page

The crossword puzzle on the opposite page celebrates Biddy Mason's road to freedom. The puzzle is the work of Sepia Features and Jerry Grayson, whose article on the life of Biddy Mason is featured in this issue of Californian. Grayson has been crafting crosswords since the 1980s, with magazine, newspaper and book publication. A Sepia Features book of California puzzles is expected to go to press in 2026. Puzzle answers are available on the CHC website: www.deanza.edu/califhistory.

Biddy's Road to Freedom



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Across

1. U.K. clock standard

4. "Ridgemont High" roadster

9. L.A. Colisseum olympian's circuits

13. ___ California, 1845

14. "___ ___ is Born"

15. A yellow stick

16. Biddy's freedom hall, with L.A.

18. Medieval indentured laborer

19. Not-so-funny bones

20. Biddy's Winter Quarters territory

22. Telesthesia

23. A mare's sad mishap

25. Boxer's title

26. Editor's workplace

28. Kinda, suff.

30. Slack-jawed

34. ___ Mujeres, Mexico

37. Young female; never Biddy's pose

39. L.A. 'rides', 1850s

42. One of Biddy's gifts

43. 19th century feed crop

44. Tip top (2 words)

45. Longtime fuel brand

46. Presided, in court

48. Make content

52. Surprised cry

54. "Hey, you!"

57. Valkyries watchdog

58. Biddy's 1848 destination

62. Horse's trot

64. Masseur's target

65. Biddy's 1851 destination, with San

67. ___-European relations

68. Take on, i.e. court costs

69. Grp.

70. Ellen's or Ann's life stage in 1856

71. Track tipsters

72. Common 1850s L.A. home feature

Down

1. Women's wear daily?

2. Campaigns

3. Container weight

4. Coastal Brazilian state

5. G.I. entertainers

6. Digital sounds

7. Habeas corpus hearing

8. TV beatnik Maynard G. ___

9. Venue for Biddy's Judge Hayes

10. Meads

11. Fringe benefit

12. Davenport

13. Longed (for)

17. Old MTV show

21. CA governor, 1969

24. 19th century disease catch-alls

27. 1800s Southern crop dominance, sl.

29. Drummer's accessories?

31. "Wheel of Fortune" request

32. Jeu de mots

33. Head lines, for short?

35. What a young Biddy never attended

36. "Mr. Grant", to Mary Tyler Moore

38. "The Matrix" hero

39. Troop grp.

40. Data storage site

41. Sierra Madre treasure

47. Insightful observation

49. Oil worker

50. Itty-"Biddy"?

51. Dylan or Zac

53. Something to kick

55. Lasting wounds

56. Toni Morrison's "___ Baby"

58. Playlet

59. Child of Biddy or Hannah, alt.

60. A 49er's quest

61. Lotto variant

63. Keep-quiet contracts

66. Kook

CHCF

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https://www.deanza.edu/califhistory/

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