

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

LONG BEFORE THE California State Board of Trade promoted California as “The Land of Promise” in the late nineteenth century, the region already enjoyed a reputation for natural abundance. In the early nineteenth century, at Mission San José, Father Narciso Durán marveled at the beauty and plenitude of the San Joaquin Valley. For Durán, the valley was “like a park because of the verdure and luxuriousness of its groves and trees” and it teemed with “every kind of animal, terrestrial and aerial.” Earlier, in 1542, a chronicler travelling with the Cabrillo expedition described California’s “very beautiful and well-populated valleys” and “fine plains and many trees and savannas.” Today, the state’s leading tourism industry group, Visit California, urges tourists to “Dream Big.” “Surf in the morning,” its website touts, “powder in the afternoon” in a sporty, newfangled, iteration of the trope of abundance.

Less celebrated but no less important for California has been the multitude of historical societies it has spawned. Although their numbers have dwindled in recent years as the ranks of volunteers has thinned, there are still more than one thousand historical societies spanning the state, according to a recent estimate by the Conference of California Historical Societies. There are probably as many museums, and we have featured a few in this issue. From California’s largest metropolitan regions to its smallest towns, there are countless librarians, archivists, collectors, and history enthusiasts – most of whom work as volunteers – who have painstakingly preserved documents and artifacts of the state’s rich history. In this special issue of *California History* we have reached out to a diverse handful of these entities to learn about their collections and exhibits, and to inspire our readers to hit the road in search of new stories to tell about our extraordinary land.

JOSH SIDES, LOS ANGELES