

# WHAT THE WATERS TELL ME: HOW THE CREEKS SHAPED BERKELEY'S HISTORY

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*"Berkeley is a creek run underground it winds and flows / It's submerged but it resurfaces / the purpose is to go."*

*- Dan Wolf, Daylighting*

You can hear the sound of running water all throughout Berkeley—whether buried underground, flowing through a park, dripping into your basement, or flooding into the bay. The land surrounding Berkeley's five creeks was originally settled by the Huichin and Cochen bands of the native American Ohlone tribe since 3700 BCE, when they first settled along Strawberry Creek.

Three years after the first European contact with the San Francisco Bay in 1769, an exploratory expedition led by Pedro Fages, future California Governor, set up camp on the banks of Strawberry Creek near today's West Gate. The Spanish occupation disastrously changed life as it existed. By 1820—a little over 50 years after the first European contact with the area—all the Native people were gone.

Following the Spanish settlement, industry exploded in the Ocean View district. After the discovery of gold in the Sierra Foothills in 1848, San Francisco experienced a massive population influx of over 25,000 people in one year. The effects of this population boom rippled throughout the area, during which time Captain James Jacob arrived along the water in the present day Berkeley Marina, where in 1853 he established Jacob's Landing, a wharf that developed into a commercial hub.

As industry continued to grow in Ocean View, in 1873 the founding of the College of California (to become the University of California) dammed up Strawberry Creek in the hills. This dam, predating the union of Ocean View and the College of California by five years, devastated water quality in the flatlands—creating "a duality that still exists today." As Berkeley began urbanizing in the 1880s, farmland was replaced with housing tracts and creeks were channeled and buried underground throughout the city.

While the creeks became increasingly absent from everyday life in Berkeley, legislation bisected the hills from the flats even further—from zoning

laws beginning in 1916, to restrictive housing legislation, to the continuing defacto segregation throughout the 1950s, and finally to the inflation of housing costs from the 1980s to the present. Though by no means solved, today Berkeley residents are drawing attention to inequality and providing solutions through groups such as Berkeley Food and Housing, Berkeley Free Clinic, East Bay Community Law Center, and many more.

Today, thanks to environmental restoration groups such as Friends of Five Creeks, Berkeley's creeks are rising back to the surface through a process named "daylighting"—releasing them from their pipes. In 1984, the daylighting of Strawberry Creek became one of the earliest examples of daylighting in the United States. Originally covered up by the Santa Fe Railroad around the turn of the century, city landscape architect Douglas Wolfe proposed converting the abandoned railyard into a park featuring the creek. This proposition was initially objected to by city officials, but lauded by enough community members to push it forward. Now, Strawberry Creek Park is a space that attracts dozens to hundreds of visitors a day.

For more dramaturgical materials, including a "Who's Who," videos from the original storycircles, and the audience's very own Berkeley stories, visit [www.shotgunplayers/online/daylighting](http://www.shotgunplayers/online/daylighting).

