

# Final Sabbatical Report

## Professor Patty Colman

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#### Introduction

In 2004, as a historian for the National Park Service, I uncovered the identity of one of the first and most significant African Americans to settle in Los Angeles. During the late nineteenth century, John Ballard helped to build the first black community in southern California. He owned property, co-founded a church, and participated in the Reconstruction-era civil rights movement. I quickly realized that not only had scholars skipped Ballard's life, most had skipped right over his entire community. As my research revealed this legacy, I recognized the contribution his story would make to the field. However, I simply did not have the time to complete the research, write an article for publication and disseminate the information to academia and the public. For this reason, I am so grateful to Moorpark College and the Ventura County Community College District for granting me a sabbatical during the Spring 2012 semester. My proposal consisted of the three goals: **complete necessary research, join the Los Angeles History Research Group, and write an article for publication.** Not only did I accomplish these goals, but the sabbatical experience exceeded my expectations and benefited me personally and professionally in numerous, immeasurable ways.

#### Benefits to Faculty Member, Students, and College

John Ballard was born in Kentucky in about 1830. At that time, the state was home to 165,213 slaves and while Kentucky did have a free black population, it represented only 1.3% of the overall state population. It is therefore most likely that Ballard was born a slave, which makes his appearance in California in the 1850s even more intriguing. I wanted to try and uncover clues to Ballard's early life as a slave and how he was able to journey out of Kentucky and into California. Although I was trained as an American historian and have taught slavery for over a decade in the classroom, I needed to gain a more nuanced and specific understanding of the system in Kentucky during the antebellum period.

The information gleaned from secondary sources, in addition to primary source research conducted in Kentucky, has given me a much deeper and enriched understanding of slavery, race, politics, and westward expansion during the antebellum period- a period critical in United States history and themes central to the COR (Course Outline of Record) of History M07A. While in Kentucky I discovered several deeds of manumission and "freedom papers" granted to African American men, women, and children. These records are extremely rich as they detail the lives of freed people in a way that textbooks cannot and will be used in my courses. In addition to searching for Ballard's records, I visited several historical sites that pertain to my courses: the Abraham Lincoln Birthplace and boyhood home, the old slave market in Lexington and the home of Henry Clay. Information, photographs, and resources gathered at these sites add valuable context to my lectures.

Produced to me by the last and now I have upon said deed  
Hethy. Ballard, to be her last and now I have upon said deed  
Mortgage and this certificate been recorded in my office  
Given under my hand this 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1845  
James S. Whitaker  
Shelby County Court

Know all men by these presents that I  
Robert Y. Robb of the County of Shelby and State of Kentucky from  
Motives of benevolence and humanity have manumitted and do  
hereby Manumit & set free from Slavery a Negro man of a bright  
Mulatto complexion about five feet seven and a half inches in height named  
John and about Forty nine years of age, And I do hereby give grant  
& release to him the said John all my right title and claim of  
in and to his person Labour & Service and of in and to the estate  
and property which he may hereafter acquire or obtain  
In Witness Whereof I have hereunto  
set my hand and affixed my seal this 13<sup>th</sup> October 1845  
attest  
Henry C. Milson  
Master C. Whitaker  
Shelby County Court

Example of manumission deed for "a negro man of a bright mulatto complexion about five feet seven and a half inches in height named John" in 1845.

After leaving Kentucky, John Ballard settled in Los Angeles just as California became the 31<sup>st</sup> state in the nation. Even though the state constitution banned slavery, the "peculiar institution" persisted in California, including in Los Angeles. I read a great deal of secondary sources to learn about this, but it was again the primary source research (such as historic newspapers and voter registration rolls) that made the biggest impact. I discovered several previously unknown records pertaining to slaves in Los Angeles County. This information is included in my article, and has garnered some of the most positive feedback from readers and reviewers as this has never been examined in detail before.

In the 1860s John Ballard co-founded the First African Methodist Episcopal Church in Los Angeles, a major cultural landmark in this city. The history of the church's early founding was unknown not only to the historical community, but to the current church congregation. The church provided spiritual guidance to the black community in LA, but it was also instrumental in supporting civil rights, including black suffrage after the Civil War. For example, the church sponsored a Fifteenth Amendment "ratification ball" and church members, including John Ballard, were the first black men to vote in Los Angeles County. These untold stories make an important contribution to the historiography and have allowed me to develop new areas of expertise. I have incorporated these stories into my United States history courses, M07A and M07B, and look forward to developing them further when I have the opportunity to teach California history in the near future. My sabbatical experience has also benefitted my students because it has expanded my capabilities as a researcher. Moorpark College is primarily a transfer institution and the four-year universities expect that our students will have had exposure to research methods. My own research can serve as a model for instruction and hopefully inspire students as they complete their own projects.

All of the research conducted while on sabbatical, whether in a dusty basement archive in Kentucky, or in the plush comfort of the Huntington Library in San Mateo, California, has allowed me to make professional connections with numerous scholars, archivists, and community members. For example, since uncovering FAME church records, I was honored at a ceremony for my research. I have corresponded and shared my article with curators at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington DC (part of the Smithsonian Institute). Special Collections at UCLA has requested my research materials so that they can be permanently archived in their collection of Los Angeles History. The results of my work are reaching an even wider audience now, as my article is currently being used in a Historical Research Methods class at CSUN. As this is Moorpark College's top feeder school, this is an excellent link between faculty, students, and our history departments. These connections and relationships are important in building on the already stellar reputation of Moorpark College and the Ventura County Community College District.

Finally, my research has reached an audience outside of California and even the United States. Before my sabbatical, I was interviewed on NPR and featured in an MSNBC.com series of videos. The *Los Angeles Times*, *Ventura County Star*, and the *Lexington Herald-Leader* interviewed me and wrote stories about the Ballard family. I have written sections for two books, *Three Magical Miles: An Appreciation of the Past & Present of Malibou Lake and Vicinity* and *Rentyhorn*, a book published in Finland. I have given numerous public talks (and several at Moorpark College) in the past and one is scheduled for 2013 at the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum. I look forward to presenting at the 2013 Moorpark College Multicultural Day and giving talks to other community audiences.

### Summary of Completed Sabbatical Goals

#### **1. Complete research**

During my sabbatical, I read numerous articles and books about slavery in antebellum Kentucky, such as:

Jewett and Allen, *Slavery in the South: A State-By-State History*  
Lucas, *A History of Blacks in Kentucky, volume I*  
Stamp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Antebellum South*  
Post, "Kentucky Law Concerning Emancipation or Freedom of Slaves"  
Coleman, *Slavery Times in Kentucky*  
Harrison, *Antislavery Movement in Kentucky*  
Hudson, *Fugitive Slaves and the Underground Railroad in the Kentucky Borderlands*

I also spent two weeks in Kentucky conducting research and looking for clues to Ballard's background. Finding a slave in the historical record is practically impossible, and I was aware of this before I began my search. I spent days combing through wills, estate settlements, census and slave schedules, tax records, and vital records from the 1840s and 50s. While I did not find irrefutable evidence of Ballard, I did gain invaluable knowledge and insight into the system of slavery in antebellum America. This research was conducted at:

Kentucky State Archives  
Filson Historical Society  
Frankfort Library  
Shelby County Archives  
Kentucky Historical Society

Back in California, I continued my research at local institutions such as the Huntington Library, San Fernando Mission Archives, Seaver Center, Los Angeles County Records, Los Angeles Public Library, Stagecoach Museum, Museum of Ventura County, Agoura Library, CSUN Special Collections, and Rosedale Cemetery. I uncovered numerous records pertaining to John Ballard and the Los Angeles African American community. Nineteenth century newspaper articles, property deeds, and court cases helped me reconstruct this community. I also read numerous books and articles pertaining to California and Los Angeles History such as:

Bunch, *Black Angelenos: the Afro-American in Los Angeles 1850-1950*  
Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America*  
Katz, *The Black West: A Documentary and Pictorial History of the African American Role in Westward Expansion of the United States*  
Thompson and West, *History of Los Angeles County, California*  
Lapp, *Blacks in Gold Rush California*

Some of the materials that I required were gathered through Interlibrary Loans in conjunction with the Moorpark College Library. The library staff was extremely helpful in coordinating these loans. Some materials were very rare and only available at one repository in the state. For example, I borrowed the entire 1889 edition of the *Ventura Vidette* newspaper (microfilm) from the California State Library. I located an article detailing the tragic fire at Ballard's homestead site near Agoura. The reporter claimed that "some miscreants stole up to the premises of old man Ballard, an inoffensive colored man, and set his barn and out houses on fire."

As noted in my sabbatical proposal, a mountain peak near Ballard's homestead had been known since the early Twentieth Century as "Nigger Ballard Hill," "Nigger Head Mountain," and finally since the 1960s, "Negro Head Mountain." After petitioning the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors and the United State Board on Geographic Names, the mountain was renamed "Ballard Mountain" in 2009, due to my research. This inspired me to develop another area of expertise during my sabbatical: geographic place names. Currently, there are over 500 place names in the United States with "negro" in the name; there are 55 in California alone. The vast majority of these hills, valleys, and creeks were named for an African American individual or community, and at one time, the name was not "negro" but the more racially offensive term. To learn more about this peculiar tradition, I read several books and government manuals such as:

Orth and Payne, *Principles, Policies, and Procedures: Domestic Geographic Names*  
Stewart, *Names on the Land*  
Gudde and Bright, *California Place Names: The Origin and Etymology of Current Geographical Names*  
Monmonier, *From Squaw Tit to Whorehouse Meadow*

Studying this nomenclature was incredibly valuable, as it involved an aspect of American identity and civil rights which I had never considered. These place names, including the history and naming of Ballard Mountain, can be an excellent way to teach the civil rights movement in

History M07B, a major learning objective for this course. This experience has also allowed me to gain a national reputation as an expert on such renaming efforts. I was contacted by the *New York Times* to comment on one of their stories about an offensive Texas place name connected to Governor Rick Perry. I also consulted with a group in Colorado about renaming a mountain in their community.



## **2. Join the Los Angeles History Research Group**

This prestigious organization is part of the Huntington-USC Institute on California and the West. Scholars submit papers for peer review and are then discussed at meetings at the Huntington Library. The group's mission is "to encourage an exchange of ideas and concepts that can aid each scholar's work. The group provides a forum for the latest scholarship on Los Angeles, as well as for innovative interdisciplinary projects that engage Southern California history." Participation in this group greatly increased my knowledge on western history and introduced me to several prominent historians who provided me with valuable advice. In addition, I became a Reader at the Huntington Library, which allowed me to become a member of a larger academic community and participate in several seminars and conferences.

## **3. Write an article for publication**

My article, "John Ballard and the African American Community in Los Angeles, 1850-1905" was published in the Summer 2012, Volume 94, No. 2 issue of the *Southern California Quarterly*. This is an academic journal published by the Historical Society of Southern California, founded in 1883. Internationally renowned and respected historians such as Kevin Starr and Steven Hackle serve as members of the Board of Directors. In addition, in 2012, the *Quarterly* launched a partnership with UC Press, digitally publishing the journal and making all articles available online.