

SANTA CRUZ ITALIAN DRUIDS

Who were the Druids of old?

In the year 61 AD the Roman general Suetonius Paulinus attacked a Celtic army on an island off the extreme northwest corner of Wales. The historian Tacitus described the scene: (1)

The enemy lined the shore in a dense armed mass. Among them were black-robed women with dishevelled hair like Furies, brandishing torches. Close by stood Druids, raising their hands to heaven and screaming dreadful curses. This weird spectacle awed the Roman soldiers into a sort of paralysis. They stood still – and presented themselves as a target. But then they urged each other (and were urged by the general) not to fear a horde of fanatical women. Onward pressed their standards and they bore down their opponents, enveloping them in the flames of their own torches. Suetonius garrisoned the conquered island. The groves devoted to Mona's barbarous superstitions he demolished. For it was their religion to drench their altars in the blood of prisoners and consult their gods by means of human entrails.

In this dramatic scene the Druids appear to be priests, expected to call down divine wrath upon the Roman invaders. The only ancient detailed description of Druid ceremonies comes from Pliny the Elder, according to whom the Druid priests used a golden sickle to cut mistletoe from an oak tree so that the cuttings fell on a white cloak. Then, to complete the rite, the priests killed two white bulls and offered them so that the plants, which they considered to have great healing power, would be effective. Although Pliny considered the Druid rite to be a kind of magic, a religious superstition, he placed his description not in a chapter treating religion, but in one that dealt with the medicinal properties of plants. (2)

Other writers from antiquity, that is, from the first century BC to the fourth century AD, presented the Druids as priests, judges, and wisemen in the Celtic culture of Britain and Gaul. There was general agreement among them that the sacrifice of humans was part of the priestly role. The only author, however, who actually saw Druids was Julius Caesar. The rest, like Tacitus, wrote many years, even centuries, after the events they narrated. The accuracy of their reports can be doubted, especially regarding the more bizarre activities like the wicker burning man, a huge figure in which live people were caged and which was then set on fire. (3)

A full understanding of ancient Druidry awaits the day when more is known about the development of religion in Europe in the 20,000 years preceding Caesar. Whatever Druids did will then be viewed in the historical context of the development of natural ("pagan") religion in northern Europe. Of special interest is that the relationship, if there was one, between Druidry and Shamanism will be better understood in this context. (4)

The force of Roman arms served to eliminate Druidry so effectively that there is no reliable history of it from the end of classical times until the modern age. The ancient role of *Ovates* (soothsayers) and that of *Bards* (poets), however, remained in Ireland many centuries after the Druids were gone. (5) An apparent bridge for the remembrance of the Druids was Irish epic poetry, which began to appear as written literature in the early Middle Ages, when the Christian

monks had become scribes. In this literature the Druids were more like court magicians than religious figures. (6) Later, in the Middle Ages, Druids came into Welsh literature as bards. (7)

It was not until the fifteenth century that pseudo-histories created for the little-known ancient Druids the romantic image of national heroes who upheld the strength and integrity of their people against foreign invaders. Hundreds of such books containing such fiction about the Druids were written. Curiously this movement originated in Germany, from which it spread to France, and only then to Britain. (8)

Modern Druids, or Druidry Reinvented

In mid eighteenth century William Stukeley, an English physician/clergyman/archeologist initiated the study of prehistoric monuments, including Stonehenge, in England. In addition to his scientific archeological work there was “Stukeley’s personal belief in a primeval religion which had been shared by all the peoples of the remote past, because he saw it as the natural one for primitive humanity to embrace.” (9) Furthermore he resuscitated the Druids as religious figures associated both with the ancient religion and with the ruins of Stonehenge, crystalizing the popular image of them. (10) After Stukeley came various self-appointed, self-annointed, Druid leaders who formed nature religion groups that included apocryphal tales and imaginary archdruids as essential elements of their practice. (11)

Some of the new religious Druid cults, or *orders* as they are properly designated, lived short lives or remained exclusively in England (especially in Wales). Others are still in existence and call their local groups *groves* because some of the references to Druids from antiquity relate that they held their meetings in oak groves. Several orders can be found today in California, such as the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids (OBOD). The original OBOD died in 1975 with its founder, (12) but a descendant of it remains and is found in in Los Gatos. (13) A nature religion Druid grove of another lineage is Ochrehills, which is to be found in Gilroy. (14) The Reformed Druids, RDNA, also a nature religion order, are of American origin, having been established in Carleton College, Minnesota, in 1963. There are RDNA groves in the Bay area, including San Jose. (15)

A great turn in the history of Druidry occurred in 1781, when a certain Henry Hurle and a number of his friends got together in a London pub and founded a fraternal benefit society similar to the Masons, calling it the Ancient Order of Druids (AOD). The AOD was not religious, but a little historical mystique and some ceremonies for insiders made it attractive. The time was right: the industrial revolution in England had produced thousands of male non-farm workers who had no one to provide for them and their families except themselves. In 1801 there were no fewer than 7,200 fraternal benefit organizations in England, and apparently 40% of the “working population of London” belonged to them. By 1831 the AOD had 193 lodges and over 200,000 members in Britain, America, Canada, and India. Splintering, however, had begun as early as 1824, and the UAOD, United Ancient Order of Druids, was established in 1833 in London. (16) The author Stuart Piggott points out the reason for the split: the majority of AOD members wished the organization to be known as a “straightforward charitable institution,” but had to secede in order to proclaim this characterization. (17) The UAOD crossed over to the

United States early in the nineteenth century, and although it dissolved itself in England in the late twentieth century, (18) it still exists in the United States.

Santa Cruz Druidry

I have found no evidence that the AOD or any branch of the nature religion Druids existed at any time in Santa Cruz. The UAOD, however, swept over California and Santa Cruz. By 1871, according to the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* of Nov. 11, 1871, there were UAOD groves “in nearly every state,” and the order had been introduced to “most of the principal towns” of California. San Francisco had about 1,500 members in 14 groves. Although the order continued to grow in reality, the *Santa Cruz Surf* of June 19, 1894 noted that it was established in 23 states (rather than nearly all of them). All in all there have been 285 UAOD groves in California; seven of them in Santa Cruz County. The year of the greatest recorded statewide membership was 1924, when there were more than 15,000 members. (19)

Of the 285 UAOD groves in the State, Madrona Grove #21 was the first to be established in Santa Cruz. In reporting this event the *Santa Cruz Sentinel* of November 11, 1871, stated, “The objects of the U.A.O.D. are the promotion of social and intellectual intercourse among its members, and the establishment of a system of philanthropy and benevolence, providing for the sick and distressed, the widow and orphans, and for the decent interment of its deceased members.”

Beginning in 1871, for 98 years the UAOD was a notable organization in Santa Cruz. A couple of *Sentinel* items from the early years are the June 12, 1875 report about a picnic the Druids held with the Redmen; the January 15, 1876 coverage of the UAOD election of officers; and the August 6, 1881 mention of an official visit of the “Grand Officers” from San Francisco to Santa Cruz, including an excursion to Big Trees in Felton. The UAOD Grand Grove held its annual meeting in Santa Cruz in 1885. In featuring the meeting, the *Santa Cruz Surf* of June 3, 1885 added that “this jurisdiction” had 1547 members in 29 Groves and that the local Treasurer’s report included disbursements to the heirs of two members. From another source we know that in 1875 the Madrona Grove lent \$150 to Timothy Dame, owner of the Carmelita Cottages on Beach Hill, Santa Cruz, and that Dame paid the loan back in a timely fashion. (20) Madrona Grove #21 also figured on the 1892 list of Santa Cruz societies. (21)

The *Santa Cruz Surf* of June 19, 1894 announced that the UAOD expected 200 delegates to its annual meeting, to be held in Santa Cruz. The article added a fanciful history of the Druids in antiquity, and gave a statement of the UAOD’s objectives, which were

To unite men together, irrespective of nation, tongue or creed, for mutual protection and improvement; to assist socially and materially, by timely council [sic] and instructive lessons, by encouragement in business, by assistance to obtain employment when in need; to foster among the members the spirit of fraternity and good fellowship; and by a well regulated system of dues and benefits, to provide for the relief of the sick and destitute, the burial of the dead, and the protection of the widows and orphans of the deceased members.

By this time, 1894, Madrona Grove #21 had been joined by two other groves in the County. The complete list of Santa Cruz County UAOD groves with their dates of founding is: (22)

1871 Madrona #21
 1885 Hazel Dell #50 (Watsonville)
 1890 Luis de Camoen #81
 1901 Watsonville #135
 1902 Santa Cruz #142
 1904 Slavno #169
 1928 Watsonville #259

Although the California UAOD reached its maximum membership in the 1920s, it was going strong in the following decade. The 1937 state convention, planned for June 20 to 24 in Santa Cruz, was in April in peril of being moved to San Francisco because of the expenses of the accommodations and the ballroom rental for the 600 delegates and 600 others expected to attend. The front page of the *Santa Cruz News*, April 5, 1937, however, reported that the businesses cut their prices and Santa Cruz was to remain the location.

I do not know when Madrona Lodge #21 ceased to exist. There was a lodge in Watsonville as late as 1960, and even in the 1960s three UAOD lodges listed their address as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) Building in Santa Cruz. By 1969, however, there was only one lodge left, and even it was gone the next year. (23) This last lodge, Santa Cruz Lodge #142, however, has left behind an account of itself that sheds light on the general history of Santa Cruz.

UAOD Lodge #142, that is to say, had hundreds of members in the course of its 98 years. At least 95% of these members had Italian family names; they were Italian immigrants or their sons. The fact that there were so many Italian Druids appears rarely, if at all, in the histories of Santa Cruz and the books written about the county's Italian immigrants. There are only two sources of information known to me: the *UAOD Dues Ledger* of the 1930s and 1940s, and the burial records of the IOOF cemetery, which is now Santa Cruz Memorial Park. The ledger is in the possession of the Santa Cruz County Museum of Art and History Archives, and a copy of the burial records is in the Santa Cruz Public Library Genealogy Room. (24)

The ledger entries show the amount of dues each member paid each year from the year he joined. There is, unfortunately, no heading to tell us when this ledger, which carried forward information from the past, began, but it seems to be about 1932, and it definitely ends at the end of 1949. In all cases the ledger lets us know the year the member joined, and these dates go back to the early 1900s. Such biographical notes are thus available for over a thousand members, 224 in the letter B alone, and 68 in the Ss, including six for the well-known Stagnaro family.

The only other information to be obtained from the ledger pages is the mailing address of the members. Many of these are post office boxes, some are out of town, and some are indecipherable to me. Taking the first third (from the letter A to the letter D) of those which had clear, local street addresses, I found 132 locations where Italians lived in Santa Cruz City and surroundings. Plotted on a map, the 132 yield a good picture of where Italian Americans lived in the 1930s and 1940s:

<u>Santa Cruz City</u>	<u>No. of Addresses</u>
Center	35

Lower west side	26
East side	10
Upper west side	13
<u>Upper east side</u>	<u>7</u>
TOTAL CITY	91

<u>Outside City</u>	
Coast Road	14
Davenport	6
Bonny Doon	1
Felton	11
Live O-Cap-Soq	6
<u>Aptos</u>	<u>3</u>
TOTAL OUTSIDE CITY	41

<u>General Summary</u>	
City Center	35
West	59
East	26
<u>North</u>	<u>12</u>
GRAND TOTAL	132

The overwhelming majority of Italian immigrants to the United States and their immediate families retained the relation to the Catholic Church which they had in Italy; to find them buried in a non-Catholic cemetery more than fifty years ago requires an explanation. Especially puzzling on the face of it is their being buried in a Druid cemetery. Santa Cruz Memorial Park, as I have observed, has a Druid section that holds the remains of over 100 persons buried from 1905 on. Twenty-six, all Italian names, are of the letter B alone, and seven, all Italian names, of the letter S: roughly one for every ten members in the financial ledger. Phil Reader, the historian of Santa Cruz Holy Cross Cemetery, assures me that the Druids had obtained permission of the Catholic Church to have their own area in the IOOF Cemetery.

The arrangement of burying Catholic Druids in a specially blessed area of an otherwise non-Catholic cemetery is not unique to Santa Cruz. A Mr. Mark Gonnella, descendant of Italians in Occidental, California died recently, and, after services in the Catholic Church, was buried in the local Druid Cemetery. (25) There was also the cemetery, now neglected, of an Italian Druid lodge in Roslyn, Kittitas County, Washington. (26)

It is clear that much remains to be known about Santa Cruz's Italian Druids. I offer the present essay first of all simply because it is interesting. Then it will be an aid to anyone who in the future will continue to look into their history. At the least, the ledger and cemetery records noted here may be of use to researchers looking for information about Santa Cruz Italians.

Notes

1. Tacitus *Annalium Liber XIV*, xxx. Translation by Michael Grant in Tacitus. *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Penguin books, revised edition, 1971, pp. 327-328
2. Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia, Liber XVI*, 115
3. This and other reliable historical information on the Druids is found in two well annotated books, both entitled *The Druids*, one by Stuart Piggott and the other by Ronald Hutton. See bibliography.
4. Piggott, pp. 184-186
5. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, p. 1298

6. James Bonwick, *Irish Druids And Old Irish Religions*, *passim* (This book serves as evidence that scholars were aware of their fanciful character over a hundred years ago.)
7. Hutton, p. 57
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-14
9. *Ibid.*, 158-159
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15
11. *Ibid.*, 158-172. (Important names in this sequence are Iolo Morganwg, Owen Morgan, William Price, and George Watson Macgregor Reid.)
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-194
13. www.druidry.org 2010
14. www.ochrehills.com 2010
15. www.rdna.info 2010
16. Hutton, pp. 137-145
17. Piggott, p. 180
18. Hutton, p. 152-155
19. The remarkable website of Mill Valley Freemasonry, noted in the bibliography, contains both an excellent historical survey of the UAOD in California and the list of its 285 numbered groves, the latter in its Appendix website.
20. Rick Hyman in "The Early History of the Carmelita Cottages: The Owners, Part 2" in *Every Structure Tells a Story*, Santa Cruz: Santa Cruz Historical Trust, 1990
21. E. S. Harrison, *History of Santa Cruz County, California*, San Francisco: Pacific Press Publ. Co., 1892, Chapter XIV, "General Description"
22. <http://mill-valley.freemasonry.biz/marin-fraternities-Appendix02.htm>
23. *Polk City Directories*
24. The burial records are in *Santa Cruz Memorial Park Cemetery and the Santa Cruz Mausoleum Compiled Records*. Santa Cruz, California c2000. (Thanks to Marian Pokriots, Past President of the Santa Cruz Genealogical Society, who stimulated me to inspect the cemetery records, and to Amy Dunning, Archivist of the Santa Cruz County Museum of Art and History, who alerted me to the ledgers.)
25. www.bodegabaynavigator.com/interiorpages/OcciNews/OcciNews.htm 2010 (The year of the death and burial appears to be 2007.)
26. www.interment.net/data/wa/us/kittitas/druids/druids/htm 2010

Bibliography

- James Bonwick. *Irish Druids And Old Irish Religions*. London: Griffith, Farran, 1894; in www.sacred-texts.com.
- Ronald Hutton. *The Druids*. London: Continuum Books, 2007. (Focuses on the historical development of Druidry from antiquity to the present.)
- The Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Third Edition Revised. Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Stuart Piggott. *The Druids*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1985. (Piggott's focus is on the physical archeology of the Celtic world.)
- <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/nrms> 2010.
- <http://mill-valley.freemasonry.biz/marin-fraternities-02.htm>. 2010
- <http://mill-valley.freemasonry.biz/marin-fraternities-Appendix02.htm>. 2010
- Polk's Santa Cruz California City and County Directory*. R. L. Polk and Co., San Francisco and Los Angeles, 1935-1970.

Santa Cruz Memorial Park Cemetery and the Santa Cruz Mausoleum compiled records. Santa Cruz, California c2000.

Santa Cruz (Daily) Surf

Santa Cruz Sentinel (Santa Cruz News in 1937).