

The Reactor

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An Update on Geography

There are more than 25 million Californians, and more than 24 million of them arrived, either by birth or immigration, after 1933.

Of the 5½ million who lived in California in 1933, far fewer than one million of us are still alive and in California, and lot of those, like me, are too young to remember that year.

That's why it's fun to read what Herbert Floercky told the kids of 1933 in his California state textbook, "Visual Geography of California." Pacifica dentist Nile Porter ran across a copy and gave it to me, knowing my peculiar taste for facts.

For example, in 1933 California was the second state in area, sixth in population. Now it's third in area, first in population. California led in phones per capita then, and I'll bet it still does. California was second to New York in auto registration. How many years since we took over first place?

Does California still lead the country in production of dry beans? Do we still lead in production of borax, gold and chromite?

In 1933 the state was looking forward to the results from the series of great dams then planned. There was Kennett reservoir, with Kennett dam scheduled to back up one-third of the water impounded in the state. If you've never heard of Kennett (a town in Shasta county) it's now at the bottom of Shasta Lake. Somewhere along the way, the name Kennett lost out to Shasta.

The book talks, in relatively simple terms, about California's history, geography, water, natural resources, minerals, and transportation. I'm sure that students who read the book conscientiously learned a lot about California and it stuck with them for life.

In fact, they might have learned more about what the state was like then than kids learn in school about what

California is like today.

Just as San Pedro Valley (Linda Mar) actually tends southeast/northwest and we tend to think of it as east-west, so California is focused southeast/northwest. That's why Mount Whitney, which most of us think is in southern California, actually is due east of Monterey, which we think of as northern California. That fact has not changed in fifty years, and is unlikely to, at least in my lifetime or yours.

Alpine County in 1930 had 241 people, and L.A. county had about 2.25 million. Both have grown a lot, but they have stayed about the same, relative to each other.

San Francisco, which had 634,000 people in 1930, has changed relatively little in 50 years. If the counties of San Francisco and San Mateo had not split back in 1956, it's likely that San Francisco would have simply absorbed the new communities that became Daly City, Pacifica and perhaps South San Francisco and San Bruno, and the political history of the area would have been very different.

California has changed since 1933, yet the outlines of what we have now were visible then, and many of the trends were well along at that time. What do you suppose this city and this state will be like in 2033? The mountains and the rivers will still be here. I wonder about the rest.

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