

[NO.61 FALL 2002](#)
[BENE LEGERE](#)
[NEWSLETTER OF](#)
[THE](#)
[LIBRARY](#)
[ASSOCIATES](#)

- [Charles Franklin Doe and Michael Reese: Library Legacies](#)
- [New Library Prize to be Awarded for Outstanding Undergraduate Research Projects](#)
- [The Teaching Library: Reaching Cal Undergraduates](#)
- [The Reference Center and the Great Rooms](#)
- [Bear in Mind: The California Grizzly at The Bancroft Library](#)

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Bear in Mind: The California Grizzly at The Bancroft Library

There is no better place to host an exhibit dedicated to the California Grizzly Bear than The Bancroft Library! Where else could one find unique diaries, letters, photographs, and artwork placed alongside rare books, journals, posters, and other scholarly materials. As Susan Snyder and Bill Brown, co-curators of the exhibit will tell you, there is "bearly" enough room in the exhibit cases to scratch the surface of Bancroft's extensive collections.



Painting of Grizzly bear. C. Hart Merriam Pictorial Collection.

Library exhibits often pay homage to a noted individual, such as an author, scholar, or important historical figure. Exhibits sometimes recognize important donors and collectors. Certain exhibits may also commemorate important dates, eras, and events in history. Bear in Mind: The California Grizzly at The Bancroft Library, August 26 - November 27, 2002 touches upon each of these themes, as it explores the physical extinction and the cultural resurrection of the California Grizzly Bear.

Exploring the rapid extinction of California's largest land animal, the contemporary symbol of our state and the mascot for the UC Berkeley campus, illuminates many aspects of California history. The California grizzly "serves as a fitting microcosm for the study of California history from the 1700s to the present," said Charles B. Faulhaber, the James D. Hart director of The Bancroft Library.

"Through the lens of time, one can view the brutality, ignorance, romance, guilt, and 'redefinition' that characterize our treatment of this icon of California history."

The California Grizzly Bear once roamed the shores and hills of California, as the true "monarch of the mountains." The grizzly, a largely vegetarian omnivore, is believed to have once numbered 10,000 within the state. The arrival of European explorers and the population explosion generated by the California Gold Rush marked the beginning of the end for this massive animal. Forced from coastal areas and lowlands to inland areas in search of food and safety, the bear became the target of hunters who killed the bear for sport, to assist ranchers and farmers, or for simple bragging rights. Spanish caballeros roped grizzlies, dragging them into doomed public battles with wild bulls.

At the end of the nineteenth century the California Grizzly Bear represented man's last challenge to conquer and settle California's rich agricultural, grazing, and mineral regions. Civilization demanded the submission of nature's largest, strongest, and most feared animal. Scientists, such as Berkeley's own C. Hart

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Merriam and Joseph Grinnell hurried to study this disappearing creature. For many, however, the extinction of the grizzly bear signaled a measurable victory against the savage wilderness and a triumph for the modern elements of California society-expanding cities and towns, increasing commerce and industry, and improved agricultural and livestock ventures.

Susan Snyder, Head of Access Services at The Bancroft Library and co-curator for the exhibit noted, "It's a sad story. The grizzly was here for centuries and, in a flash, he was eradicated. They were gone before people realized what was happening." Bill Brown, Head of Public Services and co-curator observed, "Beginning in the 1850s the introduction of modern weaponry and technology, in the form of better rifles, traps, and poisons, spelled disaster for the grizzly bear."



Grizzly Island Asparagus Label Annie Montague Alexander, naturalist, philanthropist, farmer, and founder of Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, chose this design and logo for her "Grizzly Island Asparagus." By 1931 the Sacramento River Delta farm owned by Alexander and her partner Louise Kellogg was producing 10,000 crates of asparagus per year. Collection of Robert Jones

Today, the California Grizzly Bear remains as a multi-dimensional symbol. American Indian cultures continue to revere and fear the spirit of the bear as a symbol of strength, power, and, on occasion, evil. California's own statehood is intimately linked to the symbol of the grizzly bear-beginning with the Bear Flag Revolt of 1846 and the appearance of the bear upon the first state flag. In the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries the image of the California Grizzly Bear evolved to represent a bygone era. As the grizzly bear dwindled in number, its legend grew. Nostalgic views depict the bear as a symbol of a simpler, more romantic era. Commercial images exploit this notion in an effort to imbue agricultural and manufactured products with these same qualities.

This exhibit presents letters and diaries of explorers, hunters, and goldminers; published narratives and descriptions of encounters with bears; and illustrations, photographs, maps, museum specimens, artwork, and ephemera arranged to illuminate the historical significance of the California Grizzly Bear.

The California Grizzly Bear-the real California Grizzly Bear-is an important historical figure in our state.

Collectors such as Hubert Howe Bancroft and others have helped The Bancroft Library gather a treasure-trove of rare and unique historical materials. The

California Grizzly Bear viewed across the centuries, from the earliest known myths and legends of Native Americans to its extinction and subsequent resurrection as a symbol of our state, helps us understand the many cultural, economic, and social forces that have shaped the growth and development of California.

Highlights of the exhibit include:

The recently-acquired original manuscript of Theodore Hittell's 1860 landmark biography, "The Adventures of James Capen Adams," or "Grizzly Adams." The six hundred+ pages record Hittell's personal interviews with Adams in the

1850s. Grizzly Adams was a legendary figure in California. Famed for his skills as a hunter and trapper of grizzlies and other wild animals, Adams killed scores of grizzlies, shipped live animals to the east coast and Europe, and also raised young cubs as pets. Adams and his long-time pet, "Ben Franklin," often walked the streets of San Francisco.

The transcript of an 1887 interview with hunter George Nidever, who claimed to have killed more than 200 grizzlies in the 1840s and 1850s.

Nineteenth century posters and broadsides advertising grizzly bear fights and exhibitions, including one event at the Iowa Hill Amphitheater.

Other items in the exhibit include lithographs and artwork from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection; and a statuette of "Oski," UC Berkeley's costumed mascot introduced in 1941 after the use of real bears at athletic events was discontinued.

[\[top\]](#) [\[prev\]](#) [\[next\]](#)

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