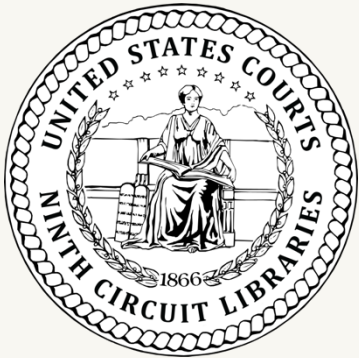


60 Years, Deeper Roots

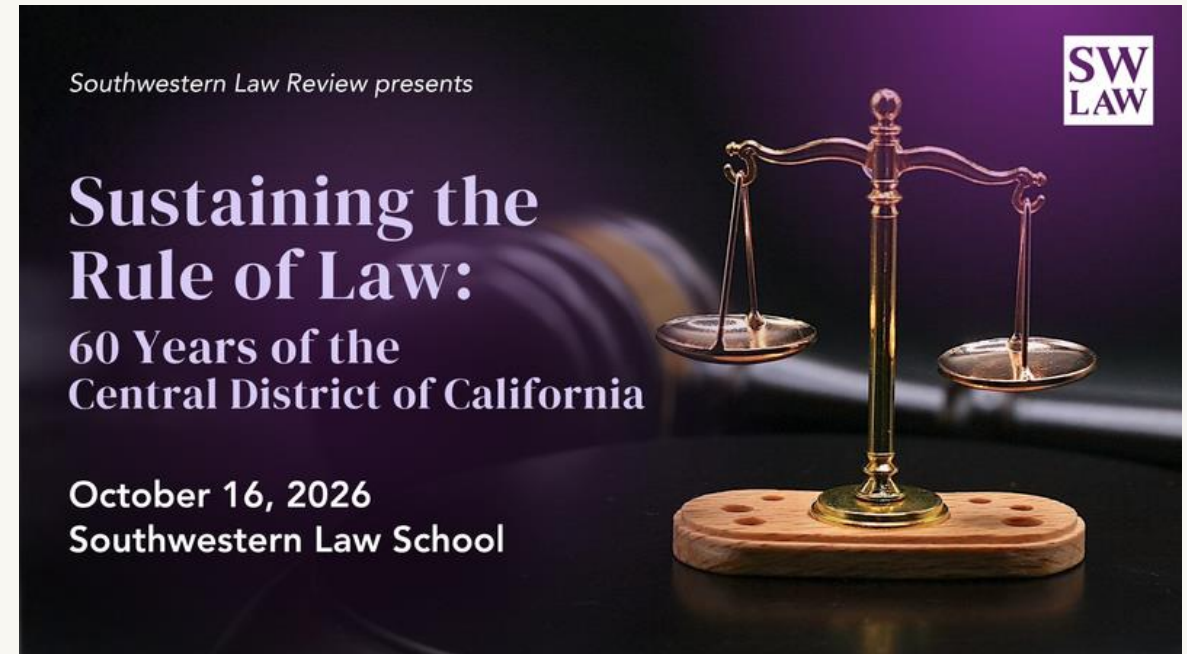
The Origins and Evolution of the
Central District of California



Julia Seiter

US Courts Library, Los Angeles

Julia_Seiter@lb9.uscourts.gov



Vigilance Committee



Committee Seal as featured in The San Francisco Call (San Francisco [Calif.]), September 9, 1903

Organization of the Vigilance Committee.

Whereas, It has become apparent to the citizens of San Francisco that there is no security to life and property, either under the regulations of society as it at present exists, or under the laws as now administered, therefore, the citizens whose names are hereunto attached, do unite themselves into an association, for the maintenance of the peace and good order of society and the preservation of the lives and property of the citizens of San Francisco, and do bind ourselves, each unto the other, to do and perform every lawful act for the maintenance of law and order, and to sustain the laws when faithfully and properly administered. But we are determined that no thief, burglar, incendiary or assassin shall escape punishment either by the quibbles of the law, the insecurity of prisons, the carelessness or corruption of the police, or laxity of those who pretend to administer justice.

And to secure the objects of this association we do hereby agree:

First, That the name and style of the Association shall be the *Committee of Vigilance*, for the protection of the lives and property of the citizens and residents of the city of San Francisco.

Secondly, That there shall be a room selected for the meeting and deliberations of the committee, at which there shall be some one or more members of the committee, appointed for that purpose, in constant attendance at

Committee Announcement in the Daily Alta California, Volume 2, Number 185, 13 June 1851

California Federal Judicial Districts: 1850–1966



**September 28,
1850**

9 Stat. 521

Northern & Southern Districts created; one judgeship each.



**August 31,
1852**

10 Stat. 76, 84

Northern District judge also serves Southern District.



**January 18,
1854**

10 Stat. 265

Separate Southern District judgeship reauthorized.



**July 23,
1866**

14 Stat. 209

California assigned to the Ninth Circuit.



**July 27,
1866**

14 Stat. 300

California consolidated into one judicial district; one judgeship.



**August 5,
1886**

24 Stat. 308

Northern & Southern Districts restored; one judgeship each.



**March 18,
1966**

80 Stat. 75

Eastern & Central District established; modern four-district structure takes shape.

2 Districts



1 District



2 Districts

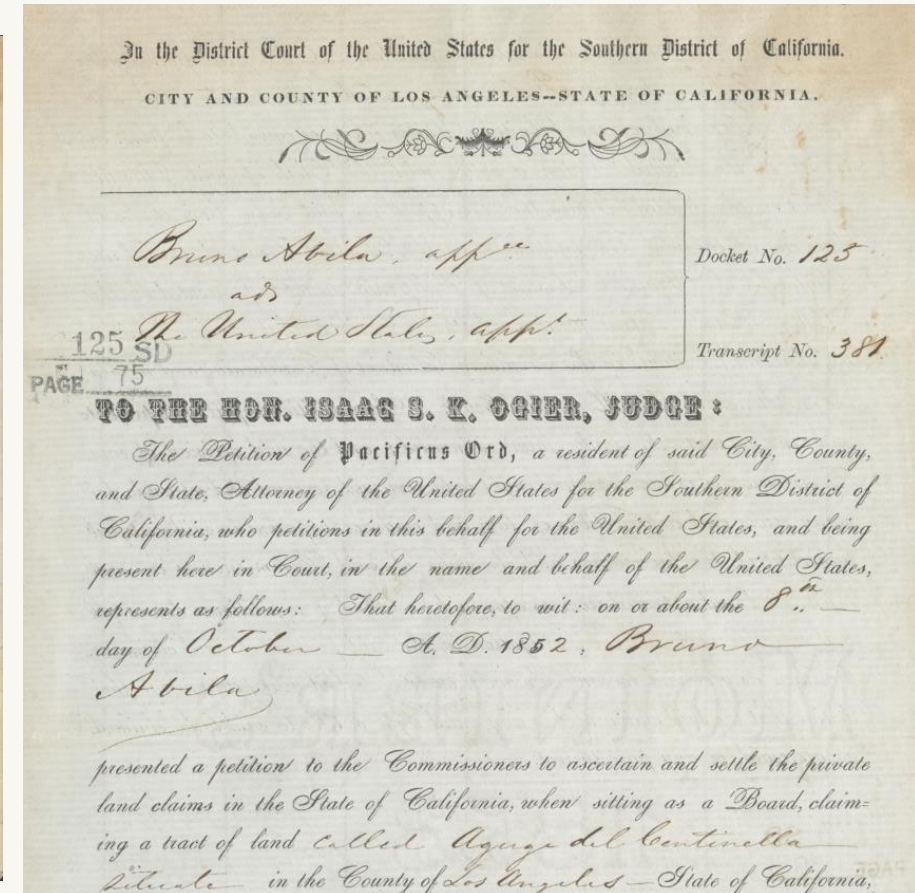
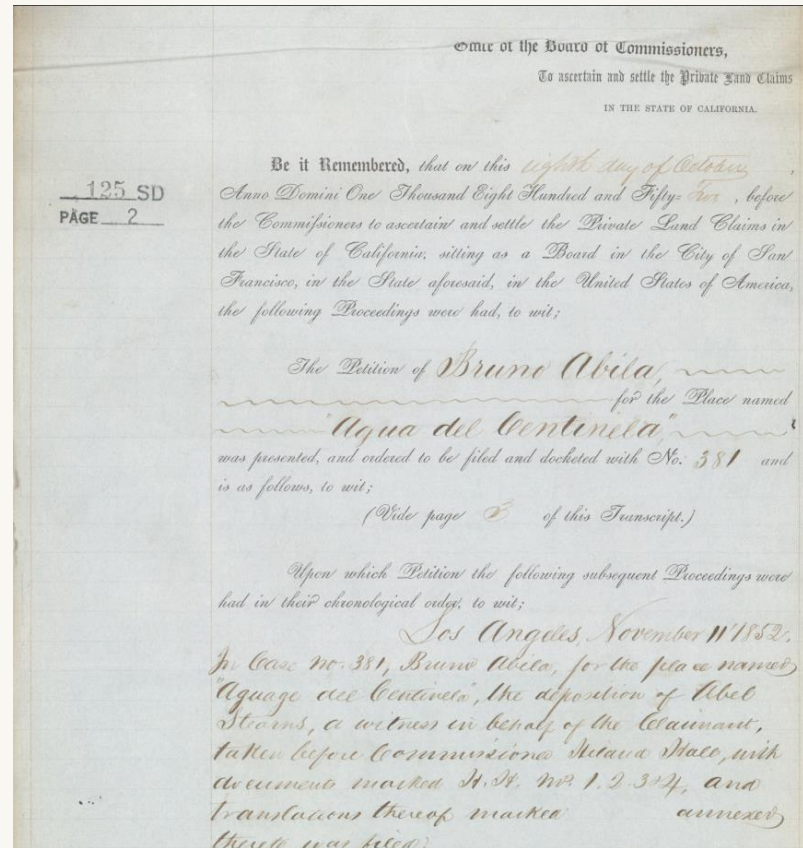
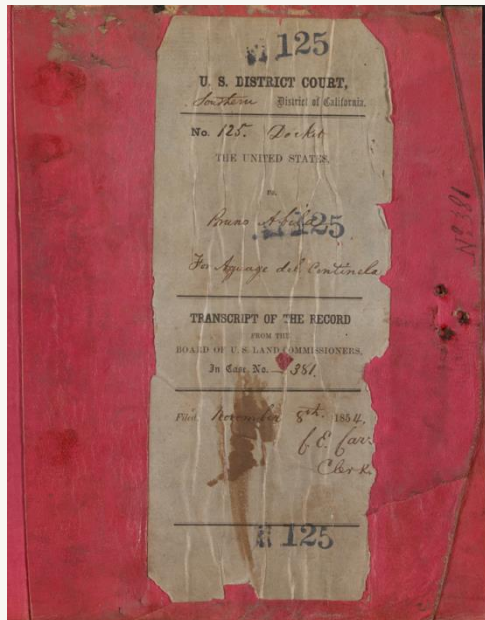


4 Districts

An Early Land Claim Record

Aguaje del Centinela
also called "Laguna del Centinela"
[Los Angeles County]

Bruno Ávila, Claimant & Patentee
Case no. 125
Southern District of California.



Courtesy UC Berkeley Digital Collections



California's Original Southern District: First Judges, 1850–1895



1850–1851

**James McHall
Jones**

9 Stat. 521

First Judge of the
Southern District.

1852–1854

Ogden Hoffman, Jr.

10 Stat. 76, 84

Northern District judge
assigned to sit for the
Southern District.

1854–1861

Isaac S. K. Ogier

10 Stat. 265

Separate Southern
District judgeship
restored.

1861–1866

**Fletcher Mathews
Haight**

10 Stat. 265

Appointed to the seat
vacated by Ogier.

1866–1886

**SOUTHERN DISTRICT
ABOLISHED**

California organized as
one federal judicial district.

1887–1895

Erskine Mayo Ross

24 Stat. 308

First judge after
restoration of the
Southern District.



1850: 2 Districts → 1866: 1 District → 1886: 2 Districts



The F&M Bank at 230-240 Main



Farmers and Merchants' Bank

230-240 Main

Photograph: Courtesy LAPL.org

United States Circuit Court.
Judge Lorenzo Sawyer of San Francisco will open the United States Circuit Court at 10 a.m. next Monday, in the rooms over the Farmers and Merchants' Bank—where will be the quarters of the newly-established United States District Court.

Newspaper notice

Los Angeles Times

January 7, 1887 · Page 8

Clipping: Los Angeles Times, January 7, 1887, p. 8

The Central District of California

Public Law 89-372

An Act to provide for the appointment of additional circuit and district judges, and for other purposes

March 18, 1966

80 Stat. 75

76

PUBLIC LAW 89-372—MAR. 18, 1966

[80 STAT.

“Northern District

“(a) The Northern District comprises the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Marin, Mendocino, Monterey, Napa, San Benito, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Sonoma.

“Court for the Northern District shall be held at Eureka, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose.

“Eastern District

“(b) The Eastern District comprises the counties of Alpine, Amador, Butte, Calaveras, Colusa, El Dorado, Fresno, Glenn, Inyo, Kern, Kings, Lassen, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Solano, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity, Tulare, Tuolumne, Yolo, and Yuba.

“Court for the Eastern District shall be held at Fresno, Redding, and Sacramento.

“Central District

“(c) The Central District comprises the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, and Ventura.

“Court for the Central District shall be held at Los Angeles.

“Southern District

“(d) The Southern District comprises the counties of Imperial and San Diego.

“Court for the Southern District shall be held at San Diego.”

Adopting a Court Seal

In re Order Adopting a Seal

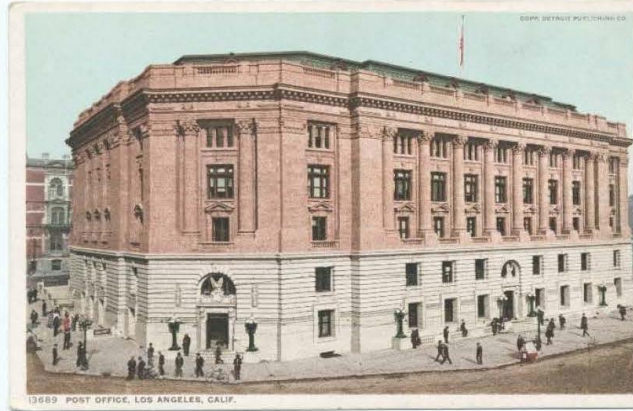
General Order 3

September 19, 1966





1892: United States Courthouse



1910: United States Courthouse



1939: United States Courthouse



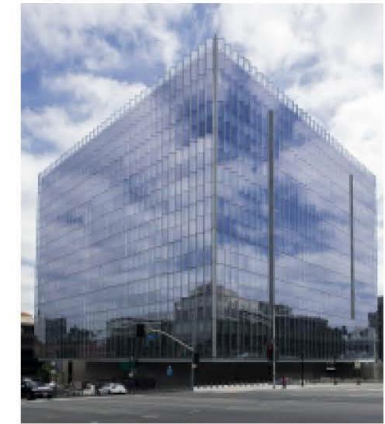
1991: Edward R. Roybal Federal Building and United States Courthouse
Los Angeles, California



1998: Ronald Reagan Federal Building and United States Courthouse
Santa Ana, California



2001: George E. Brown, Jr. Federal Building and United States Courthouse
Riverside, California



2016: The Felicitas and Gonzalo Méndez United States Courthouse
Los Angeles, California



FELICITAS AND GONZALO MENDEZ
UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE



UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE
FELICITAS AND GONZALO MENDEZ



For Further Exploration

Books & Articles

George Cosgrave

Early California Justice: The History of the United States District Court for the Southern District of California, 1849–1944. San Francisco: Grabhorn Press, 1948.

Christian G. Fritz

Federal Justice in California: The Court of Ogden Hoffman, 1851–1891. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

Christian G. Fritz

“The Judicial Business of a Nineteenth-Century Federal Trial Court: The Northern District of California, 1851–1891.” *Western Legal History* 5 (Summer/Fall 1992): 217–251.

Kermit L. Hall

“Mere Party and the Magic Mirror: California’s First Lower Federal Judicial Appointments.” *Hastings Law Journal* 32 (March 1981): 819–837.

Online Resources

Federal Judicial Center

“U.S. District Courts for the Districts of California: Judicial District Organization, 1850–Present.”

<https://www.fjc.gov/history/courts/us-district-courts-districts-california-judicial-district-organization-1850-present>

UC Berkeley Library Digital Collections

“Documents Pertaining to the Adjudication of Private Land Claims in California.”

<https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu>

U.S. District Court, Central District of California

“Historical Decades.”

<https://www.cacd.uscourts.gov/newsworthy/historical-decades>
