

Independence Days
June 19-20, June 27, July 4, Aug 8, Aug 22, Sept 12, Sept 19, Oct 3, Dec 19
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On July 4, 2026, this nation will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. One might think that this anniversary has little or nothing to do with the local history of Southern California or Encinitas. In 1776, Indigenous peoples like the Kumeyaay, who had been in this area for at least 8000-10,000 years, would not have heard of a "Second Continental Congress." Nor did the Declaration have any immediate impact on New Spain, which encompassed both Baja and Alta California. Both Californias, although outlined on dozens of inaccurate--even fanciful--maps inked with French, English, Russian, Portuguese, and Spanish coastal names, were scarcely populated by Europeans or, for that matter, by the Black Amazonian women of a mythical Indies queendom after which California itself had been named. In 1776, barely visible among some 300,000+ natives, six missions had been planted in Alta California, maintained by a handful of Franciscan padres and perhaps 500 soldiers and settler families, many of whom were themselves of Mexican "Indian blood."

But Independence Days are always aspirational. It took seven years of war for Great Britain to recognize the independence of the thirteen North American colonies, another four years for the US Constitution to be ratified, another two years before George Washington could be inaugurated as President. Similarly, Mexico declared its Independence from Spain in 1810 but could only claim that independence after eleven years of battle and then enduring three more years before the overthrow of emperor Agustin de Iturbide, the creation of the Mexican Republic and a Federal Constitution. The new Mexican government in turn was dedicated to eliminating slavery, first of Blacks and next of Native Californians in servitude to the growing number of missions. One Emancipation Proclamation after another was issued by the government in Mexico City; these too were often aspirational, as would be a series of declarations of independence, starting as early as 1836, by residents of Alta California announcing its (and their) freedom from the tyrannies of Mexico City. And when California was "liberated" at the end of the Mexican-American War, it became a U.S. "free state" in 1850 only by virtue of a compromise in the Senate that enabled the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, which required citizens of free states to collaborate in searching out and returning to their "masters" all who had fled slavery, thus perpetuating the institution of slavery in all other US states.

Indeed, for 250 years, Southern California and its resident communities have experienced an extraordinary multitude of Independence Days, each one usually promising more than it delivers--an independence sometimes withdrawn or contradicted by other laws, decrees, or sly amendments. This has been the shared experience of Indigenes, Mexicans, Blacks, Chinese, and Japanese in California, as well as by women of all backgrounds.

Therefore, starting this June, the Encinitas Historical Society plans to celebrate not a single Declaration of Independence but a set of **Independence Days**, aided by a grant from the Coastal Community Foundation. We welcome people of every age to these free events, each of which will feature a number of different and collaborative activities tied to the tradition of one-room schoolhouses and the distinctiveness of our local history. You may find yourself engaged by short vivid talks or videos, interactive displays, artmaking, storytelling, puzzle-solving. You can help us write out, with turkey quill pens dipped in vintage ink, the Declaration of Independence, and add your own signature. You might read out an emancipation proclamation, a Constitutional Amendment, or a letter yearning for independence while learning proper elocution, as did schoolchildren not so long ago. You will be invited to record a personal narrative of independence and listen to newly recorded

oral histories of elders in our community. Perhaps, just perhaps, you will invent a new app linking all Declarations of Independence around the globe or one American Independence Day to the next.

Each of us no doubt has experienced our own share of Independence Days, personal, familial, collective. Come help us explore the primary materials in our archives, which have much to tell us, for example, about the fortieth anniversary of the Independence (the Incorporation) of the City of Encinitas, later this year. Come learn about the intriguing connections, for example, between the first settler in what we now call Leucadia and the national program for the education of newly freed slaves after the Civil War. Or between San Dieguito High School, the Japanese Internment Camp at Poston during World War II, and the Encinitas flower-growing community. Or among two signers of the Declaration of Independence in Philadelphia, the exploration of the Northern Pacific coast, and California statehood.

If you know people in the Encinitas area whose life stories are of one Declaration of Independence after another, or if you yourself have a story to tell about an aspirational Independence Day, come share these with us. Encinitas may very well prove to be a hotspot of Declarations of Independence for local pods of surfers and skateboarders, bioengineers and artists, oceanographers and ecologists, spiritual and archaeological seekers, flower growers and ceramicists, garage bands and birdwatchers.

If you would simply like to join us from month to month as we unearth, recall, and elaborate upon the promise of the many Independence Days experienced in this area over the centuries, please come forward. Declarations of Independence are always occasions for finding oneself in the moment.

He who in late 1887 named Leucadia and its thirty streets of GrecoRoman glory, he who penned its first advertising and auction copy for the Leucadia Land and Town Company, was a man named Thomas Fitch. Otherwise known as the "Silver Tongued Orator of the West," Fitch was always in demand, from 1860 through to 1920, as the featured speaker at July 4th celebrations in most every State and Territory west of the Mississippi. Are we not called, then, by the very momentum of our own local history, to carry on his tradition if not also his grandiloquence?

So far as we can tell, there is no project like this anywhere else in the United States. And it is veritably aspirational—we will be depending upon your help and presence to carry it off. It is a striking historical paradox that Independence Days are almost everywhere and everywhen a call to community.

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