

REPORT TO CITY COUNCIL

DATE: JUNE 10, 2009

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF THE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: GREG RAMIREZ, CITY MANAGER

BY: LOUIS CELAYA, ASSISTANT TO THE CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: SUPPORT LETTER – COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES PROPOSAL TO RENAME “NEGROHEAD MOUNTAIN” TO “BALLARD MOUNTAIN”

On May 19, 2009, the City received a request from the Supervisor’s Third District Office to consider supporting the County Board of Supervisors (Board) proposal to the U.S. Board on Geographical Names, to rename “Negrohead Mountain”, located near Seminole Hot Springs, to “Ballard Mountain”.

The renaming of the mountain is to recognize John Ballard, an African American pioneer who migrated to Los Angeles during 1800’s, and was an important civic figure in the African American community during the early development years of Los Angeles. He was also one seven founding members of the First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church. Mr. Ballard acquired 160 acres under the Homestead Act, which included the property near Seminole Hot Springs. Historians document that the mountain was given its original name in recognition of the Ballard homestead, and is located in between the communities of Agoura Hills, Westlake Village, and Malibu.

On February 21, 2009, the Board unanimously approved a motion to submit a formal proposal to the U.S. Board on Geographical Names to rename the mountain as a lasting tribute to Mr. Ballard’s pioneering spirit duty and civic contributions during the early development years of the City of Los Angeles.

The Board’s request was presented to Legislative Committee for its review and received its full support.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council approve the letter of support for the County of Los Angeles proposal to U. S. Board on Geographical Names to rename “Negrohead Mountain” to “Ballard Mountain”, and direct staff to initiate the process required for submittal.

Attachments: Letter Supervisor Yaroslavsky dated May 12, 2009
Minutes from the February 24, 2009 Board of Supervisors Meeting
Letter of Support dated June 11, 2009
Los Angeles Time Article dated February 24, 2009
Map of Negrohead Mountain



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

821 KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET / LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012
PHONE (213) 974-3333 / FAX (213) 625-7360
zev@bos.lacounty.gov / <http://zev.lacounty.gov>

ZEV YAROSLAVSKY

SUPERVISOR, THIRD DISTRICT

May 12, 2009

Mr. Greg Ramirez
City Manager, City of Agoura Hills
30001 Ladyface Court
Agoura Hills, CA 91301

Dear Mr. Ramirez:

I am writing to ask your support for the proposal submitted to the United States Board on Geographical Names, U.S. Geological Survey by the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors (BOS). On February 24, 2009, the Board adopted my recommendation to rename Negrohead Mountain, located near Seminole Hot Springs as Ballard Mountain.

John Ballard was a participant in the civic life of the African-American community in Los Angeles settling here following his marriage to Amanda in 1859. In 1869 Ballard together with seven other men founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Los Angeles.

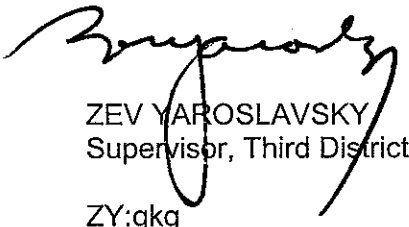
After Amanda died in childbirth in 1871, he remarried in 1880 and the family relocated to the Seminole Hot Springs area in the Santa Monica Mountains. Ballard and his daughter, Alice, filed homestead applications each receiving 160 acres in 1900.

Please find enclosed a copy of the Board motion, a photo of the mountain, a short synopsis about Ballard written by Patty Colman, History Professor, Moorpark College and the Los Angeles Times article of February 24, 2009.

Support letters can be submitted to: U.S. Board on Geographic Names, U.S. Geological Survey, 12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, MS 523, Reston, VA 20192-0523. Please reference GNIS # 1669997.

Thank you very much for your consideration. If you have any questions or need further information contact my Assistant Chief Deputy, Ginny Kruger at (213) 974-3333.

Sincerely,


ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
Supervisor, Third District

ZY:gkg

Enclosures



MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

Sachi A. Hamai, Executive Officer-
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
Los Angeles, California 90012

At its meeting held February 24, 2009, the Board took the following action:

14

The following statement was entered into the record for Supervisor Yaroslavsky:

"During the tumultuous decade in U.S. history leading up to the Civil War, the City of Los Angeles, with a population just over 4,000 residents, was home to about 60 African Americans. The constitution of the new State of California had banned slavery, and black men and women – many having fled the Southern states in search of freedom and opportunity in the American West – were able to work and own property, and developed what became a vibrant black community in Los Angeles.

"John Ballard was one these pioneers. In 1859 he married his wife Amanda and settled in Los Angeles. According to the 1860 census, he was employed as a teamster, driving horse-drawn wagons filled with goods. By 1869, he had become active in civic affairs. Along with six others, he founded the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, purchasing the property for \$1,860, as recorded in a deed dated March 13, 1869.

"By 1870, John and Amanda were the parents of seven children, but in 1871, tragically, Amanda died in childbirth. John later remarried a woman named Francis. In 1880, the Ballards decided to relocate out of the city. By then, the population of Los Angeles had soared, and with this influx of new residents from the East and Midwest, the political and social climate was changing. Historians speculate that the Ballards may have been responding to growing segregationist policies and attitudes many thought they had safely left behind in the South.

"The Ballard family made their new home in the Santa Monica Mountains near Seminole Hot Springs, and John remained there after the death of Francis in 1896. John and his daughter Alice filed homestead applications, and in 1900 each received 160 acres of land, including the property near Seminole Hot Springs. Not long after, John Ballard passed away at Los Angeles County Hospital, and was buried at Rosedale Cemetery.

(Continued on Page 2)

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"The highest peak in the vicinity of Seminole Hot Springs, more than 2,000 feet above sea level, is named Negrohead Mountain. A considerable body of historical and cartographic evidence suggests this was in recognition of the Ballard homestead. At this time, noting the civic contributions made by John Ballard and his family, it is only fitting in honor of Black History Month, 2009 that we initiate this effort to rename the mountain peak Ballard Mountain in their honor."

Therefore, on motion of Supervisor Yaroslavsky, seconded by Supervisor Antonovich, unanimously carried, the Executive Officer of the Board was instructed to send a five-signature letter to the United States Board on Geographic Names, U.S. Geological Survey, to rename Negrohead Mountain as Ballard Mountain, as a lasting tribute to the pioneering spirit and civic contributions of this courageous African-American man and his family to the political and cultural vibrancy of his community in the formative years of Los Angeles City's growth and development.

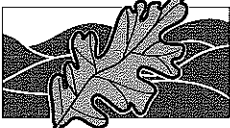
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Copies distributed:

Each Supervisor
Chief Executive Officer
County Counsel

Letter sent to:

Chairman, United States Board on Geographic Names,
United States Geographical Survey

CITY OF

AGOURA HILLS

"Gateway to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area"

June 11, 2009

Ms. Elizabeth Kanalley, Chair
U.S. Board on Geological Names
U.S. Geological Survey
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, MS 523
Reston, VA 20192-0523

Re: GNIS # 1669997 - Letter of Support
County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisor's Proposal to Rename Negrohead Mountain
to Ballard Mountain

Dear Ms. Kanalley:

On behalf of the City Council of the City of Agoura Hills, I would like to express our support for the proposal submitted by the County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisor's to rename "Negrohead Mountain" to "Ballard Mountain" in honor of John Ballard, an African American pioneer, as a lasting tribute to his civic contributions to the African American community, his pioneering spirit, and his political and cultural vibrancy to his community in the formative years of the Los Angeles City's growth and development.

We understand from the County of Los Angeles, that the Ballard family made their home in the Santa Monica Mountains near Seminole Hot Springs, a location that is in between the City of Agoura Hills and the City of Malibu. The renaming of the mountain, in addition to honoring Mr. Ballard and his family for their accomplishment and contributions, would also be a fitting memorial to this man's legacy.

It is our understanding that the proposal submitted by the County of Los Angeles requires your review and approval, and it is our hope that the U.S. Board on Geological Names approves the request to rename "Negrohead Mountain" to "Ballard Mountain".

If you have any questions, please contact Mr. Greg Ramirez, City Manager, at (818) 597-7300 or gramirez@ci.agoura-hills.ca.us

Sincerely,

Denis Weber
Mayor

cc: City Council
Honorable Zev Yaroslavsky, Supervisor, Third District



SETTLER: L.A. County officials want Negrohead Mountain in Agoura to bear John Ballard's name.

Heightened profile for a black pioneer

BOB POOL

Negrohead Mountain is an unlikely memorial to a former slave who made a name for himself at the western end of Los Angeles County.

More than 120 years ago, pioneers in the Santa Monica Mountains named the peak for John Ballard, the first black man to settle in the hills above Malibu.

Today, authorities will take the first step toward what they consider a more fitting tribute by renaming the 2,031-foot volcanic peak Ballard Mountain.

The name now used by the U.S. Geological Survey is a refinement of the slur then used by pioneers when referring to Ballard — a well-known blacksmith and teamster who put down roots on 320 acres near what is now the community of Seminole Hot Springs.

Ballard was a former Kentucky slave who had won his freedom and come to Los

Angeles in 1859. In the sleepy, emerging city, he had a successful delivery service and quickly became a landowner. Soon he was active in civic affairs: He was a founder of the city's first African Methodist Episcopal Church.

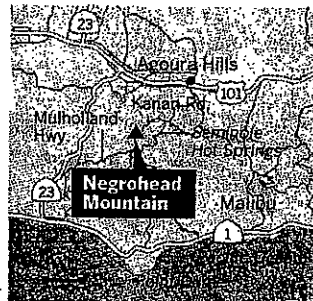
"The Ballard house was something to behold. It was built of willow poles, rocks, mud and Babcock Buggy signs ("Best on Earth"), Maier & Zobein Lager Beer signs and any other kind of sign the old man picked up. Hardly a Sun-

day passed where there were not several buggies, spring wagons and loads of people going down the canyon to see the place," he wrote.

Ballard was powerfully built — he could hoist 100-pound bags of barley with one hand — and traveled in a wagon pulled by five mules and "sometimes a cow or horse hitched up with the five," Russell recounted.

Wealthy Malibu landowner Frederick Rindge also admired Ballard.

In his own book, "Happy Days in Southern California," published in 1898, Rindge recalled a conversation with Andrew Sublett, who told how



Los Angeles Times

would-be thieves tried to chase Ballard out.

"He brought to mind how his old colored neighbor across the range had been maltreated by the settlers on account of his color; how they set fire to his cabin, hoping thus to terrorize him and drive him from the country; how some thought that the real purpose was that some men with white faces and black hearts wanted to jump his claim after they got rid of him," Rindge wrote.

"But this was not the material the good old gentleman was constructed of, and as a

shame to his tormentors, he put up a sign over the ruins of his cabin which read: "This was the work of the devil."

Ballard died in 1905 at about age 75. His daughter Alice married and moved to Vernon in about 1910. But memories of the man and his family that gave the mountain its name have survived in Agoura.

Today, Kanan Road, a busy route between Malibu and the Agoura-Westlake Village area, bisects the mountain, with its northernmost tunnel actually crossing through part of it.

The effort to rename the peak was launched by two contemporary residents who live on either side of the peak's base.

Nick Noxon, a 72-year-old retired National Geographic TV producer, first learned of Ballard when he found a copy of Russell's book in the Agoura Public Library. He and his friend Paul Culberg, 66, a retired video executive, would eventually lobby county officials to initiate a formal name change.

Culberg recalled how long-time residents had mentioned Negrohead Mountain when he and his wife, Leah, moved to the area 34 years ago. Except back then, the old-timers were still using the slur instead of "negro." The slur appears on early government topographic maps of the Santa Monica Mountains.

When Noxon met Moorpark College history instructor Patty Colman at a National Park Service event and she revealed more of Ballard's L.A. history to him, he recruited her to the "Ballard Mountain" campaign.

"People of color found opportunity in early Los Angeles," said Colman, of Santa Clarita.

Others in Agoura said it's about time Ballard be honored in a more appropriate way.

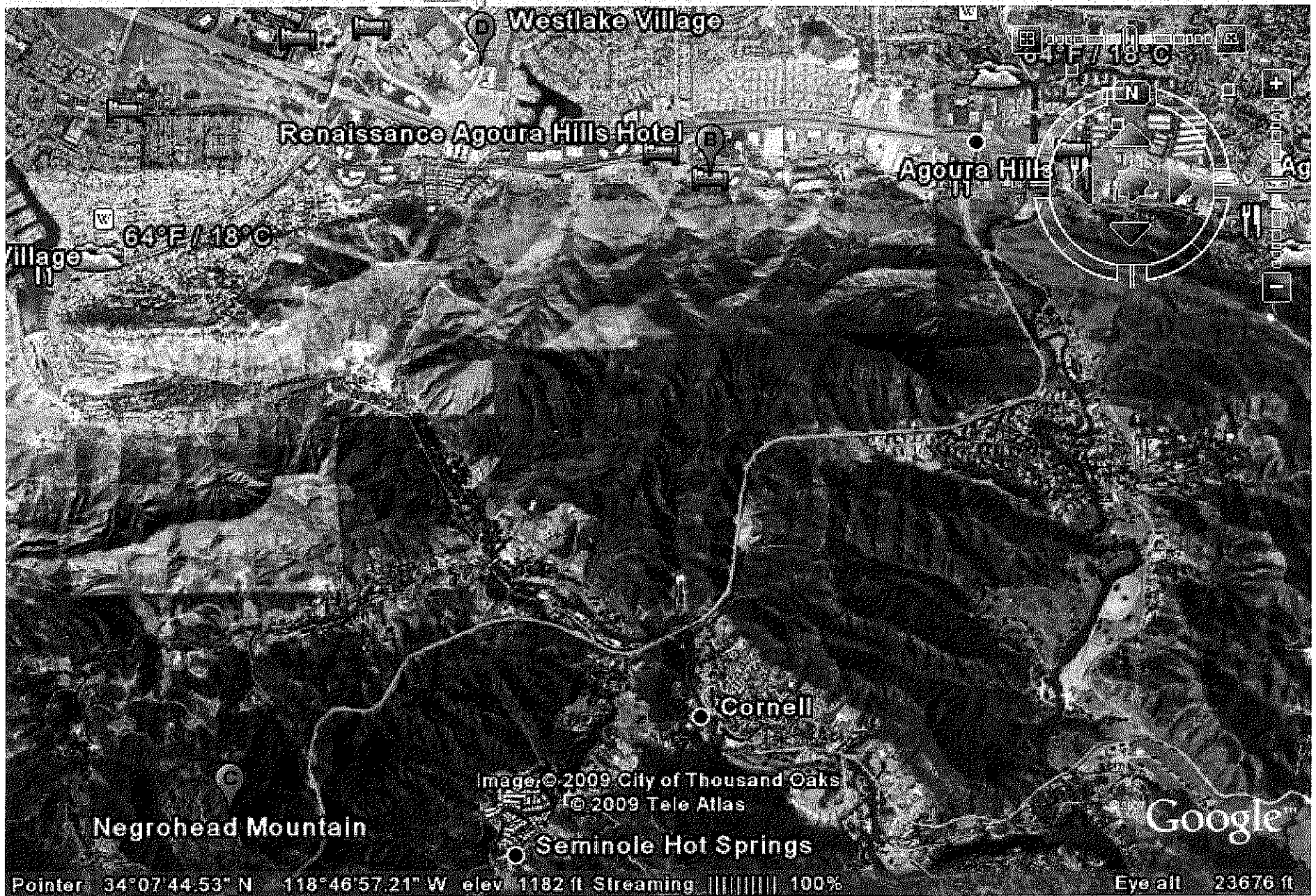
"This area has a lot of history and we should preserve it as best we can," said Vern Savko, who with her husband, Ed, has owned and operated the landmark Mulholland Highway Rock Store near the mountain for 48 years.

He said the proposed action isn't a matter of being politically correct.

"I believe in not altering history, but in this case the way to honor him is to do it appropriately. The mountain wasn't named that because of its shape. It was named after him," Yaroslavsky said.

"I'm certain that some people back then thought they were honoring him by using that name, as strange as it seems."

bob.pool@latimes.com



Westlake Village

Renaissance Agoura Hills Hotel

Agoura Hills

Cornell

Seminole Hot Springs

Negrohead Mountain

Google

Pointer 34°07'44.53" N 118°46'57.21" W elev. 1182 ft Streaming ||| ||| ||| 100%

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