

**Sabbatical Proposal**  
**Patty Colman, Associate Professor of History**  
**November 1, 2010**

**Introduction**

In 2004, my eyes scanned over a 100 year-old census record. After poring over pages of monotonous information, my eyes suddenly stopped and stared. There on the page was one mark, a letter, actually, describe the race of a family living in the Conejo Valley in 1900 (see attachment 1). John Ballard and his family were the first African Americans to settle in the western Santa Monica Mountains. That one seemingly innocuous letter was a catalyst that corrected a 100 year-old historical injustice, and if this proposal is accepted, will rewrite the narrative of the African American experience in California history. I am applying for a semester sabbatical to complete a research project on John Ballard, a 19th century African American pioneer. During my sabbatical, I will complete necessary research, join the Los Angeles History Research Group, and write an article for publication in a scholarly journal.

**Background**

The first record of John Ballard in California is a marriage certificate that states a Methodist minister hereby certify that the ceremony of marriage was performed by me on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of November 1859 between John Ballard, a colored man aged 30 years born in Kentucky and In 1859, California had been a state for less than a decade and slavery was banned according to the state constitution. With just over 4,000 residents, the city of Los Angeles was home to only about 60 African Americans. While blacks were not considered citizens and constitutionally barred from voting or testifying against whites in court, John Ballard managed to find unique freedom and opportunity in Los Angeles. During the 19<sup>th</sup>

a safe place to celebrate births and marriages, forming essential social and familial bonds. The

The First AME church of Los Angeles became one of the most important institutions for the black community, as it continues to be today. During a service on October 25, 2009 the First AME Church of Los Angeles honored me for my research (see attachment 2).

By 1870



After I discovered the origin of the name and connection to Ballard, I petitioned the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to make a formal request to the United States Geological Survey (USGS) to rename the mountain *Ballard Mountain*. The Board was very enthusiastic and after my 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 our

According to Dr. Marcia McNutt, the director of the USGS, the Board on Geographic Names receives over 100 name change requests per year. In most cases, these requests take years to process. However, this case was different. In less than a year (record time) the Board approved the request and on September 9, 2009, the mountain officially became Ballard Mountain. On February 20, 2010 over 90 people, including Ballard descendants, gathered to officially celebrate the name change and christen a bronze plaque that was placed at the base of the mountain. The renaming of Ballard Mountain brought pride to a family and a community and righted an injustice. Multiple news outlets featured the story, including international media (attachments 6-11).

While the renaming is certainly an accomplishment, my research on Ballard is not complete. There is still necessary research must be added to the historiography through formal publication. It is wonderful that the public learned about the mountain through the media, but until an academic article is written and published, Los Angeles history, California history, African American history, and United States history will remain incomplete.

## **Literature Review**

While there are numerous articles and books that explore the African American experience in California, very few focus on the individuals who comprised the 19<sup>th</sup> century black community in Los Angeles, and even fewer focus on their activism. John Ballard has never even been mentioned in any article or book. Scholars are well acquainted with a handful of individuals from this era and rely on these few to tell the story: Bidley Mason, Robert Owens and Charles Owens. While they are extremely significant, they were not the only ones who contributed to the growth of the community. An article experience will give historians a more complete picture of life in 19<sup>th</sup> century Los Angeles. It will also shed light on the early activism that is unknown to scholars.

Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (2006)

His experience *before* 1880 is evidence of early activism rarely seen elsewhere in the United States.

Lawrence B. De Graaf, Kevin Mulroy, Quintard Taylor, and Autry Museum of Western Heritage, *Seeking El Dorado: African Americans in California* (2001)

The people discussed in this anthology are those individuals long recognized as pioneers in California. The Mason and Owens families have been extensively documented and this text does not introduce anything new to the historiography. Ballard will force historians to acknowledge that others- previously unknown- contributed to the growth of Los Angeles.



the most current research. My article proposal has already been partially accepted by the *Southern California Quarterly*, an academic journal produced by the Historical Society of Southern California. I would also like to submit the article to national publications.

**Benefit to the Faculty Member, Students, College, and District**

After completion of my sabbatical, I will be a better historian a