



Justinian Caire and Santa Cruz Island: The Rise and Fall of a California Dynasty

Frederic Caire Chiles

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One of the fabled Channel Islands of Southern California, Santa Cruz was once the largest privately owned island off the coast of the continental United States. This multifaceted account traces the island's history from its aboriginal Chumash population to its acquisition by The Nature Conservancy at the end of the twentieth century. The heart of the book, however, is a family saga: the story of French émigré Justinian Caire and his descendants, who owned and occupied the island for more than fifty years. The author, descended from Caire, uses family archives unavailable to earlier historians to recount the full, previously untold story.

Justinian Caire and Santa Cruz Island opens with Caire's early life as a San Francisco businessman and his acquisition of Santa Cruz Island, where he created a ranching kingdom based on sheep, cattle, and wine. Frederic Caire Chiles examines the business practices of the Justinian Caire and Santa Cruz Island companies, documenting the island's economic ups and downs and the environmental impact of ranching in those days. Above all, he looks at the family's daily life on the island from the mid-nineteenth into the twentieth century. This epic contains tragic elements, as well. What began as a profitable ranch and an idyllic retreat ended in the family divided by bitter litigation and the forced sale of the island. Family diaries and letters enable Chiles to tell the story of an intensely private clan and its struggle to hold an island dynasty together.

The history of Santa Cruz Island has never been told so thoroughly or so well. Replete with intimate portraits and high drama, this California story will move readers as it informs them.

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