Pomo Basket Weavers in the University of Pennsylvania Museum Collections

Sally McLendon

The Deisher collection in the University of Pennsylvania Museum is the best-documented single collection of California Indian baskets from the classic period, 1892-1918. It is particularly rich in the works of weavers who spoke Pomoan languages, and even includes "photographs of quite a number of weavers with baskets...and a bit of family history." (NAA, Oris T. Mason Papers, H.K. Deisher to O.T. Mason, 5/2/1908) (Fig. 1).

The 36 named weavers in the Deisher collection represent only a portion of the two to three hundred Pomoan artists active at the turn of the century. They came from some 72 formerly politically independent tribes living in what are now Mendocino, Lake, Sonoma, and Glenn counties. They did not conceive of themselves as a single homogeneous group, but were mislabeled "Pomo" in the 20th century because they spoke seven related but distinct languages (see Fig. 2 in Patterson, this issue).

Deisher's collection is heavily weighted towards weavers from tribes living around Clear Lake in California's Coast Range of mountains, almost half from the single Native town of Habematolel (see Fig. 5). Stewart Calin, visiting Habematolel in 1906 on a collecting expedition for the Brooklyn Museum, reported that it included "about 40 houses and some 250 individuals," and was roughly the same size as the neighboring White town of Upper Lake, also "a place of about 250 individuals" (Calin 1906:15). Calin stopped at the first house at the head of the lane or street on entering the village. The owner [was] an intelligent middle-aged man [Penn Graves]...I started in buying here, purchasing freely at the prices named almost everything that was offered...on very reasonable terms. Most of the people, in fact, nearly all I met spoke excellent English, and were remarkable for their ceremonious courtesy. They seemed amazingly honest, too, and indisposed to take advantage...[They] all appeared industrious...Some of the men were making shell beads, rubbing down the wire-string disks on flat stones. The women were making baskets and all had evidences of their work in baskets made for sale, chiefly small fancy baskets, decorated with shell beads and feathers. (Calin 1906:10)

As Calin makes clear, Habematolel was a large town with many talented weavers, much visited by dealers and collectors. However, there is another reason why Deisher's collection documents so many artists active there.

Deisher's "FIELD COLLECTOR"

Henry Deisher acquired nearly all of his collection from one man, whom he liked to refer to as "my field collector": the Reverend Henry Clarkson Meredith (Fig. 2). Meredith had come to California from Missouri in 1893 to be pastor, successively, of the Methodist Episcopal Church South at Ukiah (1893-94), Fresno (1895), Stockton (1896-1900), and San Jose (1901-04). At each location he got to know the local Indian peoples, their cultures, and the difficulties they faced. Beginning in 1894, in each of the areas where Meredith preached, he acquired California Indian baskets and often stone tools or items of wealth and status. By 1903 his collection included 105 baskets. About this time he met Deisher, who shared his interest in stone tools (UPM, Deisher to G.B. Gordon, 5/19/1906). Sick

Fig. 1a. Mary Posh, aged 22, with her husband, Ned, and their children Roger and Martha. Mary Posh was baptized in 1881 and grew up at the Catholic Mission in Big Valley. Her father, Captain John Boshop, was from the Kukuiapo tribe; her mother, Pauline, was from the Elen tribe across the lake. Mary Posh married in her teens and produced the outstandingly beautiful baskets in the exhibit while caring for a growing family. She died in 1911, barely 30, after the birth of a fifth child. Her mature weaving career thus lasted no more than 15 or 16 years. Mary Posh was the first named weaver whose work Deisher bought back after Meredith moved to Clear Lake. Deisher ultimately acquired 24 of her baskets, more than by any other weaver. Photograph by A.O. Carpenter, ca. 1901. N.A.A. 81-2169 (also at UPM neg. no. 54-140582)

Fig. 1b. Fine, 3-rod coiled, red-feathered basket. Mary Posh "labored eleven months to prepare the material and weave the basket. It has the plumes of 250 quail, red crest of 223 woodpeckers, 100 piece warmpum and 32 abalone shell. The feathers are put on thicker than any I have seen." (UPM, Deisher Catalogue, no. 276). UPM N47823. Die 24 vue. Photograph by F. Sarne

34 Expedition Volume 40, No. 1 (1998)
with what proved an incurable cancer, Meredith "located" from the church in 1904, retiring to the salubrious climate at Clear Lake.

The sale of his basket collection to Deisher at this time launched Deisher's own basket collection, while providing Meredith with the funds needed to move his wife and four children to a house overlooking Clear Lake. Meredith continued to offer baskets to Deisher and Deisher continued to buy until 1907, just before Meredith's death.

The unique qualities of the Deisher collection result from several factors: Meredith's use of photography to market baskets, his deep interest in, and concern for, California Indian peoples, and Deisher's fine eye and rare passion for contextual information.

EURO-AMERICAN SETTLEMENT OF THE CLEAR LAKE AREA, 1830s-1870s

The Clear Lake area prior to White settlement was home to 15 tribes speaking six different languages. Each tribe inhabited one of several valleys around the lake, or one of three islands in the lower part of the lake. They lived in permanent named towns, accumulated wealth, and enjoyed prosperous and satisfying lives (MCleod and Lowry 1976, McLeod and Oswalt 1979).

All the tribes around Clear Lake, despite their language differences, made and used baskets which were strikingly similar in shape, technique, and function. Only very subtle differences in design choices, as well as some aspects of shape and technique, distinguished the work of peoples speaking the three related Pomoan languages (Eastern Pomo, Northern Pomo, and Southern Pomo) from that of the peoples speaking the non-Pomoan Mill Patwin, Lake Miwok, and Wappo. This perhaps reflects the extensive intermarriage over many generations that linked, and still links, these groups.

Euro-American settlement of the Clear Lake area began at the end of the 1830s with the establishment in Big Valley of a large "rancho" by Salvador Vallejo, brother of the Mexican governor of northern California. Herds of cattle were brought in, and local men recruited, sometimes by force, to serve as vaqueros. They were taught to ride and herd cattle under the supervision of a Mexican major domo.

In 1846 California was annexed to the United States, and a year later the "rancho" in Big Valley was sold to two American entrepreneurs, Andrew Kehey and Charles Stone. They went to extreme lengths to extract profits from the labor of the two tribes native to Big Valley, the Halenapo and the Kuhlano. They forced the two tribes to work for them and to relocate near their ranchhouse; they imposed curfews, forbade most customary fishing, hunting, and gathering activities without providing an alternative food supply, and beat or killed anyone they felt disagreed with or infringed on their rule. Starving, the Native peoples of Big Valley finally rose up and killed their tormentors in 1849.

Late the following spring the United States Cavalry came to Clear Lake to punish the Indians. The Native tribes of Lower Lake and Big Valley avoided the troops, who moved up the southern side of the lake towards the northwest by both land and boat. At the top of the lake the troops finally encountered a large group of Indian people camped at Badon Batin, now known as Bloody Island. The Indians did not run away, perhaps because they thought they were safe on the island, perhaps because they were engaged in the critical task of spring fishing which supplied food for throughout the year.

William Benson, an Eastern Pomo born 12 years later, was told what happened by relatives who had been on the island that day. When the soldiers approached, the Indians greeted them peacefully, but the soldiers opened fire nevertheless. The men fought back while the women, children, and elderly fled into the tall tufts surrounding the island. "One old lady," hidden under a bank covered with viles, saw two White men coming with their guns up in the air and on their guns hung a little girl. They brought it to the creek and threw it in the water. And a little while later, two more men came in the same manner. This time they had a little boy . . . when they gathered the dead, they found all the little ones were killed by being stabbed, and many of the women were also killed [by stabbing]. She said it took them four or five days to gather up the dead. (Benson 1952:271-2)

The following summer, Col. Redick McKeen, one of three Indian Commissioners appointed by the federal government to negotiate with the Indians of California, came to Clear Lake to negotiate a treaty. George Gibbs, his interpreter, reported that the Indian peoples of Clear Lake "cut their hair short" (Gibbs 1853:108). In fact, they wore their hair long, but cut it short in mourning. The people Gibbs saw must have been mourning relatives killed on Bloody Island the year before.

The treaty that was negotiated set aside Big Valley and the reservations for the seven signatory tribes, plus others who would join them, in exchange for their relinquishing title to all other lands. But the treaty signed at Clear Lake, along with 17 others negotiated in California between 1851 and 1852, was never ratified by Congress because of California's vehement opposition. Within five years settlers arrived and laid claim to all of Big Valley for themselves. During the first decade, the American settlers and local Indian peoples apparently had generally good relations, cemented by several marriages. Since the brides were often chiefs' daughters, the chief probably were following traditional diplomatic strategies for establishing relations with other groups. They were successful. Many of the new sons-in-law learned the Native languages of their wives more or less well, and acted as intermediaries, defending their wives' people against other non-Indians. But the settlers unhappily brought ecological, social, and economic changes which eventually brought hardships to the Native peoples of the Clear Lake area. And new settlers continued to come. As settlers prospered, Indian peoples became impoverished. As the numbers of settlers grew, the somewhat integrated society of the first decade was replaced increasingly by two quite separate worlds—one White and one Indian.

The Indian peoples of California were not citizens of the United States and so could not homestead land as the American settlers did. Not being aliens, they could not also be naturalized and acquire the right to take up land as many immigrants did. What could they do?

BUYING BACK THEIR OWN LAND

In the late 1870s when Indian people living near Upper Lake were ordered to move after a disagreement, John Democrat, "captain" (chief) of the Hwoluk tribe (see Fig. 5), together with a man named Irvin [Eben], thought up the idea of buying a piece of land for the use of the Indians, so that they would not continue to be kicked from one location to another. They had no money, but finally several Indians put in cash and by getting donations here and there (but only from Indians), they were able to make the down payment on a piece of property . . . A white man, who was a hop grower, Mr. McClure, put up the balance of the money for the purchase of the land. After a few years the Indians were able to pay it off [in 1879] by having payments taken out of their hop-work wage. (Mauldin n.d.:752, from Lincoln Dempsey)

Members of the Shigoms, Hwoluk, Danoha, and Kayans tribes banded together in this purchase, together with a number of families from Big Valley who were married in. They bought back 90 acres of their land north of the present town of Upper Lake on which they established Hahamorel.

It was a brilliant idea. The new community, organized much as Native towns always had been, prospered. People were free to live their lives as they chose on their own land, so long as they paid their taxes, which they did. Each of the four groups that went in...
FIG. 3. "INDIANS WHO RECENTLY SIGNED PETITION ASKING FOR ABDICATION OF LIQUOR TRAFFIC." INDIAN DELEGATES AT THE ZAYANTE CONFERENCE, 1907: The Northern California Indian Association consulted annually with Indian delegates at summer "Zayante Conferences," beginning in 1906. Most of the delegates were from communities where Pomoan languages were spoken. In 1907 the delegates prepared a thoughtful petition, asking for land, protection from the liquor trade, education for their children, equal rights under the law, and field physicians. The Association attempted to provide support for achieving all of these goals.

Mouse Horrowitz, July 19, 1907. Photograph by Penney, Courtesy of California State University, Chico, Meriam Library, Special Collections, and Bidwell Mansion State Historic Park, Cal.


Together to buy the land lived in a different part of the new town, and each continued to have his own chief or captain. On November 29, 1892, "one acre of [Habematole] on which is situated a house" was sold for one dollar "for an Indian school and chapel" to the "Trustees of the Methodist Episcopal Church et al." (Register of Deeds 1892). By 1894 the federal government provided a school teacher.

The people of Habematole were enumerated in the 1880 federal census just after the community was established. Two hundred and thirty-seven people in 117 families were living in 19 houses of traditional extended families. Culin (1906:16) reports that these were built, following the traditional pattern, of tile rafters, which insulated naturally against both the heat of summer and the cold of winter. Houses continued to be built of tile until 1894-1896, Culin said, when one person "built a board house and the others quickly followed" (1906:18). Since all the materials for board houses had to be bought with money, while the materials for tile houses were readily available for the gathering, this change in house style meant that residents of Habematole were more tied into the new, larger cash economy.

The commercial market for baskets developed just as the people of Habematole had increasing need for money. Baskets had played a major role in traditional life; 23 distinct, named types, in both twined and coiled weaves, were made and used. All but the most utilitarian were beautiful as well as functional. Baskets are, in fact, a form of sculpture in which shape, volume, surface texture, and design are simultaneously manipulated into a three-dimensional whole. The production and appreciation of art thus formed part of everyday life. By the end of the 19th century the use of manufactured goods for functions formerly served by baskets freed basket weavers from practical constraints on shape, weave, and design. From the traditional art of basket making they created the Pomo art basket an especially fine, beautiful, usually coiled basket, made as a deliberate work of art intended for sale.

THE MARKETING OF POMO BASKETRY AND THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY

By 1904, the Northern California Indian Association was encouraging the making and selling of Indian baskets as a source of needed income. This non-Indian Association was an auxiliary of the Women's National Indian Rights Association, founded and based in Philadelphia. The California Association was formed in 1894 by three San Jose women to work for justice for California Indian peoples stripped of their lands and impoverished by White settlement during the second half of the 19th century. The members discovered through Native oral traditions the existence of the 18 unratified treaties signed with California Indian peoples in 1851-52. They publicized this information, and successfully lobbied Congress to purchase land for California Indian peoples. A large number of the federally recognized tribes that exist in the state of California today acquired reservations, and federal recognition, because of these efforts (Fig. 3).

Once retired at Clear Lake, Reverend Meredith became the Field Representative of the Association in Lake County, buying and selling baskets among other things. Culin, when he visited in 1906, "found him to be a dealer in Indian curios" with "miscellaneous stuff scattered about the ball and parlor of his house" (Culin 1906:211).

A major obstacle to a retired clergymen's participation in the basket market in 1904-06 was the amount of capital needed to acquire a stock of really fine baskets. The possibility of waiting for one or more years to recoup his investment compounded the problem. Weavers wanted to be paid when they delivered the basket, not after the basket was sold. Although the prices seem shockingly low by today's standards, they were uncomfortably high then. For a good-sized, beautifully executed basket, especially if feathered, weavers asked $10 to $60. To put these prices in perspective, a farm's hired man made $20 a month, while schoolteachers could make at most $600 for a year's work, but most made much less (Purdy 1976). Harvesting string beans at Upper Lake paid $1.50 a day (Culin 1906:12). A weaver could earn as much if not more from selling a fine basket as from a season's harvest labor; and basket weaving, while preferably done during the cool, rainy months from November through May, was not limited to a few weeks a year as harvesting was.

Without a great deal of capital to invest, Meredith turned to photography. He contracted for a basket while it was being made, giving the weaver a small deposit, and promising to buy it upon completion. When finished he would photograph it, usually with the weaver, and send the photograph to prospective buyers. If the basket pleased, the buyer sent the purchase price, providing Meredith with the funds to pay the weaver.

Meredith's competitors complained that he took advantage of the weavers. But dealers frequently complained about competition from other dealers, and weavers were not easily victimized. For example, Culin (1906:43) reports that Rosa Smith, a particularly fine weaver, was working on a basket that Meredith had contracted for, but was willing to sell it to Culin for $40.
Several of Deisher’s most beautiful baskets are accompanied by a photograph that shows the basket with its maker (see Figs. 7a, 8, 9, 11a). These were certainly marketing pieces. All are large, fine pieces that would have required a sizable investment. The Deisher collection of photographs at the National Anthropological Archives, Smithsonian Institution, shows weavers with equally beautiful baskets which Deisher did not buy (Fig. 4). Some of these were later acquired by other dealers. These photographs apparently excited Deisher’s curiosity about the weavers themselves, and Meredith obliged by providing details about their lives, relationships, and sometimes the conditions under which a basket was made (see Fig. 9). When Deisher finally succeeded in placing his collection in the University Museum—for far less than he had invested in it—he sent the photographs and several notes that Meredith had included in the baskets, saying they “may be of some value to history” (UPM, Deisher Collection Papers; see Berman, this issue).

IDENTIFYING A COMMUNITY OF BASKET WEAVERS

It has been possible to identify and understand the relations between the weavers and other inhabitants of Habematomel because of the memory of Ralph Holder (see box on Weavers’ Lives). In 1976-78, we census the inhabitants of Habematomel, where he was born and raised, as he remembered it around 1906-08, when he “first began to know things.” We reviewed the names of people recorded as living at Habematomel in the 1880 and 1900 federal censuses (the only ones available at that date) and in a census prepared by the Northern California Indian Association in 1906. Mr. Holder’s intimate knowledge of the community made it possible to identify accurately the same individuals from decade to decade, despite a plethora of changing names and spellings. Mr. Holder and his wife, Suzanne Moore Holder (who also grew up at Habematomel), examined all the early photographs of the community and the Clear Lake area that I could find in archives and private collections. They recognized and identified many people, places, and events in otherwise unlabeled photographs (Figs. 1a, 4, 5). Many had been taken by the Reverend Meredith, although we did not know it at the time. With a mapmaker, we walked over the site where the town had been, and Mr. Holder identified the locations of each house and most barns (Fig. 6). Although both Mr. and Mrs. Holder were deceased when the work on the University Museum exhibit began, their knowledge has made it possible.

![Map of Habematomel](image-url)
Fig. 7a. Sally Burris, ca. 1840–1912, holding her large, diagonally twined feast bowl, with a traditional mule house behind her on the right. Sally Burris would have been around 65 when this picture was taken; her short hair shows she was in mourning. Three baskets are now known by her: two large feast baskets and a burden basket. All are strikingly similar in design and weaving technique. In fact, the two feast bowls are virtual twins, suggesting she specialized in diagonal twining and favored this classic, dramatic design, which her daughter, Laura William, also used but with 1-rod coiling (see cover). Photograph by H.C. Meredith, ca. 1905, UPM neg. no. 54-140050.

Fig. 7b. Large, diagonally twined feast bowl, “The Great ‘Shoo-set’ bowl” (UPM, Desher Catalogue, no. 307). UPM NA 7915. H. 36 cm. Photograph by F. Serin.

Fig. 8. Rosa (Burris) Smith, ca. 1875–1929, and her boat basket (UPM NA 7875). Rosa Smith, Sally Burris and Jim Burris’s younger daughter, grew up at Habematotol. Around 1894 she married Bill Smith from the Yokaya Rancheria, and they lived at Habematotol. By 1905, when this basket was made, her parents were living with them and she was the busy mother of three small children. Although the probably learned to weave from her mother, this basket is very similar in style to her older sister’s basket (see cover) and several other boat baskets made in 1905–1906, suggesting that weavers were influenced by each other’s work. Rosa Smith died of a gas embolism in 1926, at 51 years of age. Photograph by H.C. Meredith, ca. 1905, UPM neg. no. 54-140160.

Fig. 9. Laura (Burris) William, 1859–1919 (see front cover). Sally Burris’s older daughter, Laura William, grew up during the period of expanding White settlement. She married William Dick around 1877, just as her parents and other relatives were buying back their own land at Habematotol. At the time she completed the basket shown here; around 1905–06, she and her husband had four living children, one of whom, Annie, was already an accomplished basket weaver. The basket (UPM NA 7945) is the “biggest and finest Pomo boat ever made.” Pressing hard to take her picture made her mad and she refused to sell. The next effort was made through an Indian friend, but the price had now doubled on account of a buyer from Ukiah who had offered to pay more than anyone else. It was secured with considerable trouble. It was over three years under construction” (UPM, Desher Catalogue, no. 355). Photograph by H.C. Meredith, ca. 1905, UPM neg. no. 54-140186 (see at NA 41-209).

Generations of Weavers

The Desher collection includes the work of 16 weavers from Habematotol and the work of 2 more weavers is documented in the Panty Snurt Jewett collection (see Berman, this issue). Together they represent about a third of the 60 weavers active in this community during the first decade of the 20th century. All but 4 of these 18 weavers belonged to four families, three of which were themselves interrelated.

One family of five weavers whose work is well documented in these collections is that of Sally Burris (Fig. 7a), her daughters Rosa Smith (Fig. 8) and Laura William (see front cover and Fig. 9), and her granddaughters Annie William (later Boone) (Fig. 10a). Sally Burris was born around 1840, just as the first permanent non-Indian settlement in Lake County began. Since she was from Shigion, across Clear Lake from Big Valley, her life was probably little affected by the Mexican ranchero on the other side of the lake.

A second well-documented family of five weavers is that of Alice Worris (Fig. 11a) (Ralph Holder’s grandmother), her daughter Emma Charley, her relatives Betsy San Diego and Minnie Thompson Boone, and her granddaughter Ada Anderson, whose teenage work is included in the Jewett collection (see Fig. 9 in Berman, this issue). Alice Worris was born a bit later than Sally Burris, around 1845–50, into the Kukinu tribe in Big Valley. Betsy San Diego also came from Big Valley. She was probably born around 1828. Thus both women lived through the Stone and Kelsey period and in their aftermath.

Sally Burris and Betsy San Diego are only known to have woven large, splendid twined baskets that were functional as well as beautiful (Fig. 7b). Alice Worris’s grandson Ralph Holder remembered his grandmother only weaving twined baskets (Fig. 11b). However, several collections attest that she also wove fine coiled art baskets, specializing to a certain extent towards the end of her life in dramatically beautiful, totally red-feathered baskets like that of Mary Posh’s shown in Figure 11b.

Sally Burris and Alice Worris were among the founding families at Habematotol. The 1880 census specifies they lived in the same house—a sure sign of relationship. (Probably Sally Burris’s husband, Jim Burris, and Alice Worris were related.) Both grew up, married, and raised families through the early unsettled period of forced change, 1846–76. Both knew and survived the painful loss of children, and both were major artists. Thus Meredith was buying baskets from members of a large extended family that included many outstanding weavers.

A third family is that of Lydia Harris Thompson, her daughter Rosa Thompson, her cousin Laura Rickabu Anderson, and her in-laws’ wife, Louisa Rickabu. The work of a second daughter, Lyra Thompson, is included in the Sargent collection at the Field Museum in Chicago, together with examples of her mother’s miniature baskets. Lydia Thompson was also born into the Kukinu tribe in Big Valley, around 1855. She was photographed by Meredith together with two large twined baskets, one of which Desher credits to her daughter, Rosa. Aside from
The fourth family is that of sisters Lucy Bucknell and Jenny Fisher, and their cousin Sally Vicente (who is a sister in Eastern Pomo). Lucy Bucknell’s daughter Suzanna Bucknell Graves, the wife of Penn Graves (the first person Colin met at Habematolel), was also a fine weaver. Sally Vicente’s son George Vicente, a frequent delegate to the Zayante Conferences (Fig. 5), often acted as agent for his mother, aunts, and cousin, as did many men for their female relatives. Meredith does not seem to have sent Deisher a photograph of any weavers in this family, perhaps because they were always represented by their men (Fig. 5).

On August 13, 1906 Vicente wrote the dealer Grace Nicholson, offering:

(1) The Big basket that Jim, showed you when you were up to Upper Lake with Wm. Benson, is priced at $40.00.
(2) In the same house, with the big basket, is another boat shaped basket, is 22½ ins. long from tip to tip and 9 in wide in center, priced $55.00.
(Grace Nicholson Papers, Correspondence, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.)

When on August 17 Colin bought a rule mat from Lucy Bucknell, he reported “This woman made fine baskets. One large storage basket, decorated with beads, she said she had sold for $45. She asked $55 for a large and fine canoe-shaped basket” (Colin 1906:11).

The last basket was clearly the second basket George Vicente offered Grace Nicholson. Thus, the Bucknell and Vicente families were actively marketing their work and not relying solely on Meredith.

Lucy Bucknell and Sally Vicente are represented by fine coiled and feathered art baskets in the Deisher collection, but it is clear that they both made large twined baskets as well, like the other women of their generation.

Thus the women of this older generation, born in the 1890s to 1890s, either specialized in large, functional twined baskets, or made both twined baskets and coiled art baskets. However, their daughters and other women born in the 1860s and 1870s—Laura William, Rosa Smith, Emma Wertz Charley, Suzanna Bucknell Graves, and others—are primarily represented by coiled art baskets, often of large size. This may be more a reflection of Deisher’s and Meredith’s taste than the weaver’s actual preference, however. Rosa Smith’s husband, Bill Smith, offered to sell Colin for $40 “a large storage basket ornamented with beads (ham-nush, plain twined) which … [he said] was half contracted for by Mr. Meredith” (Colin 1906:43).

Most of the women born in the 1890s—teenagers like Annie William (Boone), Ada Anderson, Dora Dick, and Lucy Thompson—made small, exquisite coiled art baskets (Fig. 10b), although a few, such as Rosa Thompson and Laura Anderson, are credited with fine twined baskets as well. As weavers increasingly wove for sale they shifted from making both twined and coiled baskets to making only coiled baskets, a shift completed by the middle of the 20th century. ***

The oldest generation grew up in a largely Native world, speaking Eastern Pomo only, despite the changes then underway. The next generation knew a world in transition, which achieved some measure of stability with the purchase of the land for Habematolel. They knew more English, and some had possibly gone to the Methodist day school. The third generation had almost certainly been educated in the day school and could read and write English, but still preferred to speak Eastern Pomo in daily life.

By 1918, unfortunately, over half the members of this last generation of weavers were dead in their twenties or early thirties, often from tuberculosis or other diseases introduced by White settlers. It is possible that the high mortality rate was also due in part to living in the new board houses, which, although fashionable, were cold, drafty, and hard to heat in the winter and stiflingly hot in the summer. Many young women died before they could transmit their knowledge and skill to a younger generation; others lost the daughters who had begun to learn. The loss of so many young and talented women must have caused great stress and anguish. The weavers who survived continued to weave throughout their lives, however, and the tradition persists to this day.

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Fig. 10a. Annie William (Boone) (1885–1965) (left) with her relatives, the sisters and weavers Nancy Sleeper and May Johns, 1905. Annie William, Laura (Burris) William’s daughter, was born and raised at Habematolel. She was one of the first generation to learn to read, write, and speak English at the Methodist-run school there, but she always preferred to speak Eastern Pomo. As a teenager her work was much admired, and later in her long and productive career, some considered her to be the best living weaver. She was known for her vivacious and lively personality, and is unusually serious in this posed photograph.


Fig. 10b. Small, Fine 3-Rod Coiled Art Baskets. The left-hand basket was “made by 15 year old Annie William, daughter of Laura William (maker of big boat basket). A couple Sibu-su [coiled] baskets were being made to order by Rosa Smith, Annie William’s aunt. Annie was sitting in the next seat to Rosa, who was doing the work. Annie saw the sample and made this basket, beating Rosa by putting in the fine figure on the bottom where the sample had only four circle segments. It is a fine piece of work, 60 stitches to the inch” (Deisher Catalogue, no. 316). The other two baskets were also made by Annie William.

(Left to right) OPN 7865, Dia. 8.5 cm; NA 7866, Dia. 8.9 cm; NA 7860, Dia. 12.2 cm. Photograph by F. Saris
Weavers’ Lives

Ralph Holder remembered that when he was a boy, “They made baskets every house.” “That’s all women do, when not pounding acorns” (Holder, pers. comm. 1976). But there was a bit more to do: Holder lived with his grand-aunt, Sally Breder, (Alice Worris’s sister), and her husband, Jim Breder, and he remembered they began each day by gathering firewood for cooking (and winter heating) (see Fig. 2 in Patterson, this issue). His great-aunt then cooked breakfast and cleaned up before starting to weave baskets, after which she cooked dinner. Once a week she devoted the day to taking the laundry down to the creek to wash and dry. Some days she made or repaired clothes, using the Singer sewing machine most weavers acquired with their earnings. Some days she pounded acorns into flour for several hours for use in the nourishing staple dish, acorn soup. Other days, as foods became ripe, day-long or overnight gathering trips were made. Occasionally she went to town to store coffee, sugar, flour, fabric, thread, needles, and other supplies. Throughout these many activities, she cared for her great-nephews and -nieces.

In the spring, groups of relatives and neighbors moved for several weeks to annual fishing camps on the shores of Clear Lake, where they got "enough fish to last the whole winter" (Holder, pers. comm. 1976). In August, when 100° temperatures are common, everyone moved to camp to work in the bean field outside Upper Lake. Later there was hop picking in Mendocino County, followed by the annual acorn harvesting season. Long trips were made throughout the year to collect the four types of materials used in Pomo baskets. Redbud shoots were collected in the fall, and willow shoots in the early spring. Sedge and bulrush rhizomes were collected at any time of the year, although rattlesnakes, poison oak, and the heat were a concern in the summer. All materials needed to be carefully processed and aged for a year or two before using. Weaving a basket thus took a considerable investment of planning, time, and labor to collect and prepare the materials, as well as skill, imagination, talent, and more time in the weaving, in the midst of an already full life. Weavers were early, successful pioneers in juggling the competing demands of family and profession.

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UPM University of Pennsylvania Museum Archives, Administrative Records, American Section.