

Four Mid-Nineteenth Century Collections from the California State Parks– California Indian Heritage Center Collections

BY BRIAN BIBBY

Among the more than 3,000 examples of western Native American basketry within the California State Parks–California Indian Heritage Center collections, are some notable assemblages made by mid-nineteenth century settlers of Northern California. These collections are significant from both an historical and ethnographic standpoint as they often include basketry made before the 1889 onset of the non-Native collector’s market for American Indian basketry. These “pre-market” pieces are generally the least represented in collections, inside or outside of museums, and provide the best—and sometimes the only—examples of older, conservative baskets whose makers intended them for family and communal use or view.



Hearn Collection, Yreka, c. 1900. Courtesy of The Bancroft Library.



Minnie Hearn, photographic portrait, c. 1900. Courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum.

An important aspect of the collections made by some of the earliest non-Indian residents of Northern California is the proximity of the Native communities to the collector's residence. And though some early collectors eventually expanded their collections (likely during the market heyday of 1890–1920) to include basketry from other Native communities in an attempt to build a “one of everything” collection, the overwhelming majority of pieces in their collections are from neighboring Native people with whom they had direct contact.

The Hearn collection is a case in point. Donated to the State by Miss Minnie Hearn in 1931, the collection includes 154 baskets, along with numerous additional ethnographic and archaeological objects. Although Miss Hearn did not identify the tribal affiliations or provenance of the basketry in her collection, she spent her entire life in Yreka, briefly teaching school in nearby Scott Valley. Her father, Fleming G. Hearn, was one of the earliest settlers in the Yreka vicinity, arriving in 1851, and living on the site of Yreka before the town was established.² It appears Miss Hearn (and perhaps her father before her) collected from local Shasta and Karuk people. However, there are also a number of Modoc baskets included in the collection.

The Hearn collection may include the oldest baskets in the California State Parks collections. Miss Hearn stated that three baskets had been obtained from an old woman “who was in the Indian massacre at Shasta River, about four miles east of town, in 1855—her oldest girl... was the only woman killed. The Indians were on their annual fishing trip



Cooking Basket (Shasta), c.1850. Collected by Minnie Hearn. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. MH-4-8-SP.

instead of on the war path ...” and that the baskets were “over one hundred years old.” As the statement was made by Miss Hearn in conjunction with her donation in 1931, a date of about 1830 would result. As this time frame is probably exaggerated, it is, however, possible the baskets date to about 1850. This becomes plausible knowing that her father was in Yreka by 1851.

One of the baskets, a twined cooking vessel of pine root with a pattern woven in bear grass overlay, shows signs of significant traditional use. Years of preparing acorn soup have darkened the basket, and the abrasive movement of a wooden paddle stirring the heated stones has worn its interior surface. A patch made from a portion of another basket has been affixed to its bottom with sewing strands

of pine root where the basket’s fabric has been totally worn through.

Due to the scarcity of documented Shasta basketry within U.S. collections, the five pieces collected by Hearn are of great significance. In her description of the hopper mortar basket, Minnie Hearn stated, “Mortar basket, over 100 years old, belonged to Peggy, who with her sister Fatty saved the people of Yreka from being massacred in the 1850 period.”

The tribal identity of Peggy and the other woman is not mentioned. The fact that Peggy was living in the vicinity of Yreka at such an early time (1850s) would appear to indicate a Shasta tribal affiliation, as Yreka was squarely in traditional Shasta territory at that time. An article by a Siskiyou County historian discusses the life of Peggy and the local controversy



Peggy, photographic portrait, c. 1890. Courtesy of the Siskiyou County Museum.



Hopper mortar basket (Shasta), c. 1850. Collected by Minnie Hearn from Peggy. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. 309-2-5.

as to whether Peggy was Shasta or Modoc.³ However, the small monument near her grave reads, “Indian Peggy born about 1800. Died October 26, 1902. Beloved member of the Shasta tribe.”

The other woman from whom the three cooking baskets were obtained is likely to have been a member of the Shasta tribe based on evidence that she and her family were murdered in the Shasta River massacre of 1855. It wasn't until 1856 that many surviving Shasta were relocated to Grand Rhonde Reservation in Oregon (and later on to Siletz, Oregon).

The baskets associated with Peggy and the old woman who survived the Shasta River massacre are consistent with examples collected by Roland Dixon from 1900 to 1904.

Dixon's collection (at the American Museum of Natural History, New York) has been the main reference for Shasta basketry for more than a century. Diagnostically, however, there is little to differentiate the five Hearn baskets from neighboring Karuk or Hupa works. Dixon had speculated the Shasta imported most of their baskets from surrounding tribal communities, and that they possessed a limited basket making tradition. Such a scenario, however, would be quite a contradiction to the way of life and basket making prowess of virtually all Native people of the Far West.

Herein lay the great potential of the Hearn collection, as a possible major reference to Shasta basketry. A significant factor as to its credibility is the early and lifelong residence of the collector [Hearn] in a specific locale.



Woman's dress cap (Hupa or Karuk). Collected by Henry Diggles. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. 15-45.

Unfortunately, we don't really know how many years a cooking basket might have lasted or continued to be used within the context of the old way of life when baskets may have been cooked in two or three times a week. It is doubtful the baskets could have been more than eight or ten years old when collected. If collected as early as 1851 (the earliest date possible for Mr. Hearn), the baskets could date to as early as 1841. Nonetheless, these five pieces appear to be the oldest ethnographic baskets in the State collections.

The collection of Henry Diggles includes fifty-six baskets, donated to the state in 1933. An early and longtime resident of Scott Valley, Diggles arrived in Siskiyou County in 1857, and settled in Fort Jones by 1861. Diggles remained in Scott Valley until the family moved to Palo Alto in about 1895.⁴ The basketry in the Diggles' collection clearly reflects

the region he lived in, as most of the baskets appear to be Karuk, Shasta, and Hupa, with a few examples of Klamath-Modoc, Achumawi, Wintu, and Maidu basketry as well.

Most pieces in Diggles' collection were likely collected before 1890, and thus represent pre-market basketry. One example, though similar in every way to virtually all traditional women's dress caps from the region, has a peaked crest that may reflect an older style.⁵ This feature appears in probably less than five percent of caps from northwestern California collected before 1920. Perhaps the leading evidence for this theory is found in the collections of the British Museum, as the peaked form is present on all three caps collected during the Vancouver voyage of 1792-1794, the oldest extant examples of basket caps from northwestern California.



Portion of basket collection of Mae Helene Bacon Boggs at her home in Redding, California. c.1903. Courtesy of Shasta State Historic Park.

The collection of California (and Nevada) Indian material assembled by Mae Helene Bacon Boggs numbered approximately 348 objects when it was donated to the Memorial Museum at Golden Gate Park (the de Young) in 1903. The Boggs collection was well known at the time, mentioned in Mason's *Aboriginal American Basketry* (1902) as one of the more important collections of Native basketry in the country.⁶ The collection was part of the massive permanent loan from the de Young to the State Parks in 1958.⁷ As with the collections of Hearn and Diggles, a large portion of Mrs. Boggs' collection likely contains pre-market basketry. In a letter accompanying her donation, Mrs. Boggs stated that she began collecting in 1874, with nothing added after 1896.

Mrs. Boggs grew up in the town of Shasta, a short

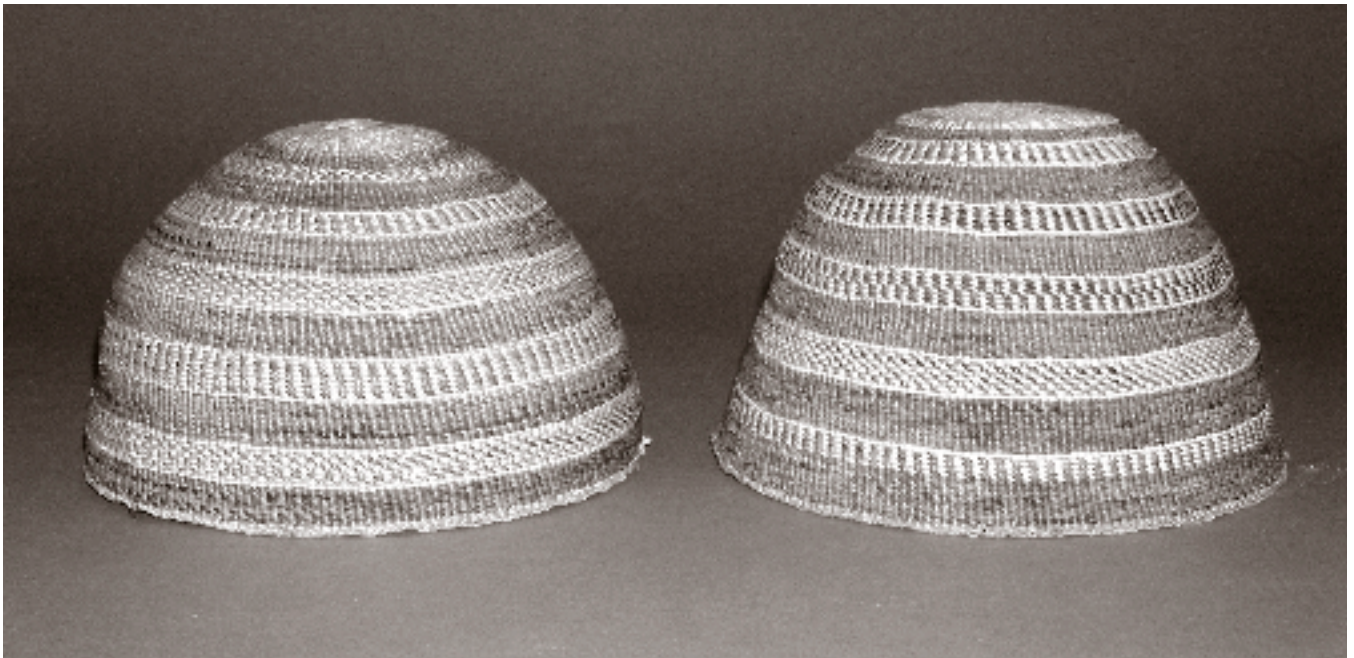
distance west of Redding. Her uncle drove for a stage line throughout the region and may have done some of the collecting.

The large number of baskets from the Pit River region are especially important as they are well documented, containing specific provenance for two distinct Achumawi bands and two distinct weaving traditions. Seventeen pieces were collected in Fall River Valley, homeland of the Achumawi proper. The remaining Pit River basketry was collected from the Astarawi band in Hot Springs Valley (Modoc County)—some 190 pieces. This is probably the largest collection of documented upper Pit River cordage warp basketry in existence.

Nearly all the examples from Hot Springs Valley have tule cordage foundations, twined with split tule weft material



Women's dress caps (Astarawi). Collected by Mae Helene Bacon Boggs. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog Nos. 47001 and 47011.



Women's caps (possibly work caps) (Astarawi). Collected by Mae Helene Bacon Boggs. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog Nos. 46989 and 46991.



Cooking basket (Pomo). Conifer root and redbud. Collected by E. S. MacCallum, c.1885. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. MCC-21-55-S.

—dyed and undyed—and include overlay of phragmites and/or bear grass. Within this group of baskets are approximately sixty-three caps, revealing a wide range of designs. It appears that the Astarawi may have made two types of caps—dress and work styles—similar in nature with the dress/work style caps made throughout Northwestern California.

The distinction between the two styles is seen in the use of full overlay for the background of a dress cap (and inclusion of an ornate pattern of dark material), while a work cap has a background of the dull, base twining material with minimal patterns of light overlay material, such as bear grass or phragmites.

The work cap might be considered as a negative compared to the positive appearance of the dress cap. A common expression of the work cap among the Astarawi appears to have included a series of simple horizontal bands. This is not unlike the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk idea for the widow's cap, in which a single or perhaps two narrow bands of grass overlay represent the only ornamentation against a dull, dark pine root background.

The collection of E. S. (Kelley) MacCallum includes ninety-two Pomoan baskets, with possible Northern Pomo

origins from the area between Mendocino and Fort Bragg.⁸ Emma Shirley Kelley was born in the town of Mendocino in 1859. Her parents, William and Eliza Kelley, had settled there in 1855. Nicknamed “Daisy,” Miss Kelley’s relationship with Pomoan people and their basketry began in her infancy, when she was carried around by attending Pomo women in a traditional cradle basket.⁹

Having married Alexander MacCallum, Daisy moved in 1885 from Mendocino to Glen Blair, a few miles east of Fort Bragg, to help manage a lumber mill owned by her uncle.¹⁰ A possible source of the Northern Pomo baskets in the collection could be from Pomo workers (and their families) connected in some way to the lumber operation. These may have been Sherwood Valley Pomo. Apparently, the Sherwood Valley Pomo had maintained a seasonal village or camp eighteen miles west of Sherwood near Glen Blair. It was called *So-le chut-te*. The Little Lake Pomo also camped there in summer.¹¹ This places Sherwood Valley Pomo, and perhaps to a lesser extent, Little Lake Pomo, in the vicinity of Glen Blair. Further research on the life of Daisy MacCallum and the history of her collection may produce useful information about the identity of Pomo sources for the basketry.



Single-rod coiled basket (Pomo). Collected by E. S. MacCallum, c.1885. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. 309-52-18L.

Many of the MacCallum pieces may be fairly early, 1870-1890, and are important examples of Pomo basketry before the collector's market began to influence native basketry in the early 1890s. The twined ware in this collection often includes conifer root as the primary sewing element, in addition to the use of sedge root. Several baskets include black-dyed bracken fern root as a design material, a characteristic of Coastal and Northern Pomo weaving. Cooking baskets woven in all three major twining techniques—diagonal, plain, and lattice twining—are represented in the collection.

A plain twined example in the MacCallum Collection (MCC-21-55-SL) employs a twining technique known as "weft reversal." With weft reversal, the weaver turns or twists the material in order to show the opposite surface of the same strand. The effect is a heightened contrast between the dark redbud design elements and the background of the design band. This again contrasts with the tan tone of the conifer root used throughout the majority of the basket. This technique appears mostly within horizontal design bands. Thus, the dark redbud elements appear in reverse on the basket interior.

A large globular single-rod coiled basket collected by MacCallum exhibits a unique feature. For the decorative design pattern in her basket, the weaver employed three horizontal bands of upright triangles using winter redbud. The primary background material in the basket is sedge root.

However, the background (white) within the bands of triangles is peeled redbud. Thus, the weaver has simulated the "weft reversal" technique found almost exclusively in Pomo twining. Additionally, this unusual basket includes bracken fern root to make a series of hash marks near the selvedge. The presence of both redbud and bracken fern root in the same basket is unusual, historically, among Pomoan weavers.

A diagonal-twined burden basket in the MacCallum collection also represents a basketry genre that faded earlier than others. While the Pomo also utilized large bell form



Burden basket (Pomo). Sedge root and redbud. Collected by E. S. MacCallum, c. 1885. Courtesy of California State Parks. Catalog No. MCC-14-55-SL.

transport baskets twined of whole willow or dogwood shoots (peeled and unpeeled) in an openwork technique (they were often used in the hop fields), the close-twined form was associated with collecting tiny grass seeds. As seed harvesting was among the first important native food resources to be altered by the influx of pioneer farmers and ranchers, it was eventually abandoned. Thus, the need for this large, elegant, finely woven basket became somewhat irrelevant. The presence of this form among the MacCallum pieces is consistent with the pre-market basketry found throughout her collection.

The reasons for collecting such large numbers of baskets by each of the four individuals or families remains illusive. It has always intrigued me that such early arrivals to the California frontier became so enamored with objects outside their own aesthetic familiarity. It is truly a testament to the innate beauty of native basketry, and the remarkably diverse functions and roles they filled, all of which impressed the immigrants. Their homes were filled with Native basketry, displayed prominently on parlor shelves, hung from the walls, and embellishing tabletops. Today, these four collections, and the many others within California State Parks and the California Indian Heritage Center, document the rich weaving history and cultural heritage of Native California. They continue to inspire, and have the potential to teach, as a new generation of Native weavers examine the forms and techniques of past masters.

Brian Bibby has been involved for the past thirty-five years as a partner in the preservation, documentation, and maintenance of California Indian cultural heritage and history. Projects have included exhibitions, publications, folk arts grants to Native artists, language preservation, oral histories, and cultural landscape studies.

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2. From the files of the Siskiyou County Museum and Historical Society, Yreka, California.
3. Drennon, Nancy. "Indian Peggy. Who Could Ever Forget Indian Peggy". *Siskiyou Daily News*. c. 1998-2000.
4. *California Pioneer Record*, Siskiyou County Historical Society; Wells, Harry L. *History of Siskiyou County*, California. 1881; and, Jones, J. Roy. *The Land of Remember*.
5. Bates, Craig D. and Bruce Bernstein, 1994. Notes on file at the Oakland Museum History Department.
6. Mason, Otis T. "Aboriginal American Basketry: Studies in a Textile Art without Machinery". *Annual Report of the U.S. National Museum, Smithsonian Institution, for the Year 1902*. Washington City. Smithsonian Institution 1904. 541.
7. 277 pieces, predominately basketry, are currently within the collections of California State Parks, California Indian Heritage Center.
8. The MacCallum Collection was officially donated to the State on 6 August 1938.
9. Scarborough, Owen. "The Story of Daisy MacCallum and The MacCallum House -1882". <http://www.maccallumhouse.com/pages/history.html>.
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11. Merriam, C. Hart. *Ethnogeographic and Ethnosynonymic Data from Northern California Tribes. Contributions To Native American Ethnology from the C. Hart Merriam Collection* (Vol. 2). Archaeological Research Facility, Dept. of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley: 1977. 40