

The Smithsonian Musum of

Natural History considers these feathered baskets "prehistoric" which might mean the 19th century. The smoothly polished deer antler awl was used to make them.







Among our people, both men and women were basketmakers. Everything in our lifestyle was connected to those baskets. Our lives wre bound the way baskets were bound together."

Susan Billy, Ukiah Pomo, master weaver, teacher

The map above shows Pomo communities that had been re-federalized (recognized as reservations) in the early 1990's, when Veronica Velarde Tiller compiled the massive modern-day American Indian Reservations and Trust Areas (1996) under a U.S. Economic Development Administration grant. Not all have re-achieved federal status yet; those are not shown on this map (which is adapted from Tiller).

"The word 'Pomo' which some believe is derived from Poma, the name of a particular village, was given to us by anthropologists at the turn of the century. Because of similarities of our basketry and culture, anthropologists conveniently saw us as one group. Actually, there are more than 70 different tribes within what is known as Pomo country. We originally had 7 different languages, but only 3 are still spoken. In terms of basketry, though, there is a commonality in our weaving -- the shapes, materials, and techniques we use." -- Susan Billy

There is another commonality, that stems from interactions with Europeans. It is well-known that the Mexican-Spanish establishd a string of missions along the California coast in the early 18th century. Indians were rounded up militarily, forced to live in mission dormitories (that kept men and women separated) and do forced labor for the church and for Mexican land grant-ranchers. About 2/3 of all California Indians were killed off in less than 100 years of this, from European diseases and hard labor. Like most Northern California tribes, the Pomo were less affected by this except for occasional marauding roundups, because the string of missions ended just north of San Francisco. Costanoan and Wappo tribes formed a partial buffer to Spanish incursions.

But the Pomo were invaded during the 18th century by Russian fur-traders, whose brutal ways were also carried out along the coast of Alaska among Aleut, Yuupik, Tlingit and other northwest coastal tribes. Indeed, through the center of Pomo Country (today comprising the California counties of Mendocino, Lake and Sonoma) runs the river still called the Russian River, after these depredations. The Russian fur trade was regularized in 1799 when one company received a monopoly charter from the Czar. In 1812 the Russians established a permanent base at Fort Ross on Bodega Bay, which was the main source of the fur animal they sought: the now nearly-extinct sea otter.

 ${f B}$ odega Bay was the most important seacoast site for summer Pomo habitation. They sought the abundant clams, fished, and got seal and bird eggs from offshore rocks. The Russian exploitation from this base, the southern limit of their fur empire in 1812-1841, was almost entirely of the Pomo peoples.

 ${f T}$ he Russian method was to attack a village and kidnap all the women and children. The

women were used as whores and domestics, children, and older women made to work fields. They were hostages for the men's forced labor: bringing in furs, meat and fish food supplies. All worked the hides. Women and children were tortured and killed to enforce compliance. The Pomo (and much further north, the Tlingit) were the only groups to mount a concerted resistance to this brutal exploitation. Here's a cleaned-up, genteel tourist version. Especially noteworthy is their genteel mention of "intermarriage with Native women" their way of describing rape.

Mostly this resistance was individual and small group efforts -- sabotages and occasional attacks on overseers, escapes -- though it helped to unify the linguistically diverse people, who were never one unified tribe. (The Pomo languages, though referred to as dialects, are not mutually intelligible.) But by the time the Russians abandoned this outpost and the Americans began to arrive with the discovery of gold in 1848, Pomo population had been reduced by murder, debilitating labor and especially by diseases, just as was the effect further south, of the Spanish Catholic mission system.

Pomo people traditionally were what has been described as "the moneyers" of north-central California. There were two kinds of trade items that served as money, that is as items of more or less standard trade value. (The value became greater the further these items were from their source.) Money was beads. Mostly from Bodega Bay came the clamshell beads seen around the edges of both baskets, above, flat, button-like disks which took on a luster and polish with years of handling. For trade, these were kept in strings, made to careful widths and exact diameters, so the number of bead-disks on a string could be measured, as well as counted. The Pomo had an elaborate numbering and arithmetic system -- base 20 and units of 400 --



to keep track of their value, which varied by diameter, thickness, and fineness of polish.

The second kind of money-beads, which were controlled by the southeastern Pomo, were made of a grey-white-buff mineral called magnesite, a deposit of which was at White Buttes, near Cache Creek. When fired, these turn beautiful banded shades of pink, orange, buff, often with bits of melted quartzite and other minerals adding to the complex shadings. These were made into tapered cylinders (and sometimes round beads). While the clamshell disks were traded in values based on strings, magnesite beads were valued much higher and traded individually -- Pomo people called the clamshell disks "our silver" and the magnesite ones "our gold." when telling Americans about it.



Interestingly, the name for magnesite in all Pomo languages was "po". No one seems to have wondered if there was a sacred meaning or story, and if this had something to do with the fact that almost all the Pomo communities called themselves by a name that had this word in a suffix. Elder, band chief and tribal historian William Benson (1860-1930) was one of the few Pomo men to make fancy baskts. His spendid oriole feather basket has already been shown. Here is an unusual fine coiled basket just 5" in diameter with an unbaked magnesite base that Benson made sometime between 1900 and his death in 1930.

A short time before his death, in 1930, Benson told some California historians the story of a little-known U.S. Army massacre of Pomo people in 1850, which has remained buried in an obscure California history journal of 1931. This seems to have been the first massacre of nearly all of peaceful village's inhabitants conducted by the U.S. Army -- a kind of warm-up for later, better-known infamies such as the dawn massacre of Black Kettle's Cheyenne band at Sand Creek, in 1864, Nez Perce and Walla Walla, in the 1870's.

It occurred on Clear Lake, the largest freshwater body in California. (On the map, it's in the orange area of Lake County, with a great many Pomo rancherias designated by alphabet letters clustered around it.)

Two abusive Americans, Charles Stone and Andrew Kelsey, had captured and bought hundreds of Pomo, forcing them to work as slaves on a large ranch they had taken over in 1847 from Mexicans. Perhaps it was to these two that the mule train of slavers was taking the Pomo children to be sold, as Elsie Allen describes on her page. Slavery was illegal in California after

the U.S. acquired it by the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, that ended the U.S. war with Mexico in 1848. But that applied only to Blacks, not to Indians. Here's <u>an account of the Army rounding up slaves</u> for ranchers. Americans enslaved Indians in California wherever they found them, for forced mining and agricultural labor. Here's Benson's description of what led to the massacre:

"About 20 old people died in the winter from starvation. From severe whippings, 4 died. A nephew of an Indian lady who was forced to live with Stone (as his whore) was shot to death by Stone. When a father or mother of a young girl was asked to bring the girl to his house [for sex] by Stone or Kelsey, if this order was not obeyed, he or she would be hung up by the hands and whipped. Many old men and women died from fear or starvation."

One day in early 1850, Shuk and Xasis, who had been working the cattle herds, lost one of Kelsey's horses. Afraid of their inevitable punishment (they would be whipped to death), they met in council with all the enslaved people to decide what to do.

"All the men gathered at Xasis's house. Here they debated all night. Shuk and Xasis wanted to kill Stone and Kelsey. They said they would be killed as soon as the white men found out their horse was gone."

5 Pomo men were assigned to strike first. They killed both Stone and Kelsey. The people fled to the hills, expecting the American soldiers to come. They planned to meet these troops in peaceful council and explain the conditions of brutal slavery that had led to what they had done.

In May of 1850, a detachment of Army regulars led by Capt. Nathaniel Lyon entered the Clear Lake area to punish the Indians for the killings. Unable to find the band of slaves who had fled, they attacked a small Pomo village, Badonnapoti, on an island on the north side of the lake -- later called Bloody Island by the Pomo. This island was formerly the sacred ceremonial site of a complex of towns around the northern part of Clear Lake.

Men, women, and children, unable to flee, were massacred by the U.S. Army there. On their way home, the troops continued their bloody actions, massacring every Indian group they encountered -- mostly Pomo groups. This just isn't in the history books, even good ones, I found it when researching for these pages. Perhaps historians were embarassed that most of their info would have come from California newspapers, like these headliners from Eureka's *Humboldt Times*: "Good Haul of Diggers," "38 Bucks Killed, 40 Squaws and Children." "Band Exterminated!" One -- *The Northern Californian* which covered it differently, told of "Indiscriminate massacre of innocent Indians -- Women and children butchered" covering the details of the brutal Bloody Island slaughter with hatchets and axes of 188 peaceful men, women and children in their villages. The youthful editor, western short-story writer Bret Harte, then had to flee ahead of a lynch mob, which smashed his printing press for daring to tell the truth about it. Here's an account of one of the masacres.

Bloody Island seems to have set a precedent for similar Army massacres of encampments in the Plains and settled farming villages among the Navajo. These better-known events mostly took place after the Civil War. The massacre and round-ups of the Pomo took place before it, just 1 year after the U.S. took control of California, after its victory in the Mexican war. Here's a detailed account by Russ Imrie (who runs the California Costanoan Tribal website) on <a href="https://doi.org/10.1001/journal.org/1

In 1851-52, a treaty commission visited California and signed 18 treaties with most California tribes, which would have reserved about 8.5 million acres for the original peoples. Under the pressure of ranchers and miners, who flooded California with the discovery of gold there in 1848, these treaties were never ratified by Congress. They "accidentally" got lost in the archives of the U.S. Senate. Instead, 4 small reservations -- Hoopa Valley, Round Valley, Tule River and Smith River, and a few small "rancherias" were established, whose purpose was more in the nature of internment camps, to get the Indians out of the way of the flood of American whites. The brutal nw invaders hunted Indians for sport. Here's an account of a sport-hunt by whites of northern California Natives that ends in a rape. Meanwhile, the Pomo, especially those in the fertile, well-watered lands at the south of their country, were rounded up in what descendants describe as "death marches" and interned at Fort Bragg to the north, and Covelo, (Round Valley).

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m ou}$ can <u>read some of this genocidal history in background sidebar -- Legacy of Nome Cult</u> --

to a detailed invstigation story of <u>recent killings at Round Valley and the trial of traditionalist Bear Lincoln.</u> In a sidebar, local racism and tribal splits (caused by missionary inculcation of militant Christian hostility to traditional culture) indicated that <u>The Indian Wars Are Not Over.</u> Thorough reportage and historical investigation by a northern California newspaper, the *Albion Monitor*. A followup on the case is a long interview with Edwina Lincoln: <u>Outlook OnLine:</u> Edwina Lincoln-Part 1

Many Pomo escaped from these internment camps and made their ways back to their own traditional village lands, somewhat corresponding to the sites today of the tiny federally-recognized reservations shown on the map.

Of course all of this caused even more cultural disruption -- in a very short period. The Pomo could not always return to their traditional villages, because these wre often on the best locations in the area, and had been taken by whites -- so the escapees tended to resettle on the isolated outskirts -- usually poor, arid land. Nor were they free any longer to follow their traditional lifeway of winter in a village site, traveling in summer to fish and clam at the sea or lakeshore. Game was almost gone, and many traditional gathering sites for acorns (a staple food) and seed grains were now inaccessible, either because taken and cleared or because the people were afraid to go there.

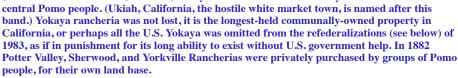
But a culturally unifying, preservative, and hope-inspiring factor entered the picture in 1871. This was the *Bole Maru* (sometimes called *Bole Hesi*) religion. "Bole" means roughly "spirits of the dead". Bole Maru was a dream-dance or ghost dance. It came from the Nevada Paiutes, just as -- a generation later -- the Plains Ghost Dances from the Paiute prophet Wovonka that touched off the Wounded Knee massacre in 1890 did.

The source in 1870 was Wovonka's father, who had the same sort of visions, which people of the Plains were not interested in until things got much worse for them, a generation later. The Pomo and Wintu who held Bole Maru most strongly, wove these into the disrupted traditional religion which the elders distinguished by calling it *saltu hesi*, rather than *bole hesi*, where instead of the spirits of the dead (boli), spirits of nature (saltu) were invoked. In those older times the dead died naturally, and the ceremonies preserved and fructified the land only in the natural way. Now there were massacres, diseases, death marches, forced internments; the land was invaded, being ripped up by miners, plowed under by farmers, fenced by cattle ranchers and built upon for cities. The old ceremonies did not have to deal with those things.

Habel H.Ko,

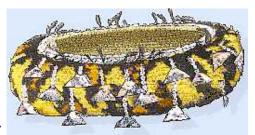
The leader of the Bole Maru, the first dream dancer and doctor, was Cache Creek Pomo Richard Taylor, brother to Sarah Taylor, the grandmother who raised California's foremost basket weaver, doctor, and cultural preservationist, Mabel McKay (1907-1993). In a recent biography of her by Gregg Sarris, the title is <u>Weaving the Dream</u>, emphasizing these two elements of great cultural importance (and the fact that she dreamed basket designs; the baskets themselves had power through those designs).

The Dream-Ghost dances aroused hope that led to practical survival actions. Pomo people began to try to buy land. In 1878, a group of Northern Pomo people bought 7 acres in Coyote Valley. In 1880, another Northern Pomo group bought 100 acres along Ackerman Creek (now known as Pinoleville). In 1881, Yokaya Rancheria was financed by



How did they do it? The Pomo did not have a money economy, although they had a sharp, clear understanding of numbers, including large numbers, and as the former moneyers or mint of central California shell and magnesite bead coinage, they had a good abstract grasp of money as a concept. But they didn't have any. Their method was collective work and pooled resources. Men and women worked in trade for land from ranchers who had huge land grants. And they also sold the one thing white people wanted: their finest baskets, especially the feathered ones.

Thus at the end of the 19th century, a substantial mini-industry in basket production for collectors, souvenir takers and museum hounds was undertaken. Perhaps this 19th-century canoe-shaped basket -- a foot long, decorated with extra-large abalone pendants -- was made for such sale (a collector gave it to the Brooklyn Museum, no maker identification).



This was the period during which some Pomo men -- like Benson -- turned their hands to learning the craft of very fine basket production from their wives and grandmothers. Their rough basketry baby cradles were still needed of course, but most of their ingenious <u>basketry fish traps</u> could no longer be used -- they couldn't go to most of the traditional fishing places. Survival depended on getting money to buy land. Fine art baskets were the only possibility beyond the very low wage labor of farmhand, ranch hand, and domestic servant, which sometimes actually paid nothing but permission to build a house on the rancher's property.

Baskets for survival and land -- the efforts, of course, also helped to keep the finest and most elaborate parts of the basketry art alive, for it was these largest, finest baskets that the collectors most wanted, and traders were willing to pay for. Basketry had truly become a survival art, in a new way.

But knowing about shell money, exchange rates, and valuations of strings of shells against all sorts of other items doesn't clue you to mortgage payments and land taxes. Mostly what the Pomo were able to raise by these intense communal work efforts was mortgage downpayments on artifically high-priced patches of unwanted land -- their own land -- sold back to them as bankers' swindles. High interest and high land taxes imposed on what could not really be a money economy (because the Pomo really had very little opportunity to raise much cash) caused the loss of virtually all this communally-purchased land except for the Yokaya rancheria by the early 20th century.

By the turn of the century, more than 2/3 of all remaining California Indians -- who had been pushed onto small rancherias to get thm out of the way of immigrants -- had lost these small patches of land, and were landless. In 1906, the 18 treaties of 1851-52 (reserving 8.5 million acres) which the Senate somehow "lost" wre accidentally found. So Congress authorized an investigation of the California Indians' situation, and public reaction eventually supported the passage of annual appropriations to purchase land for landless Indians. Some 54 rancherias were established as federal reservations, almost all of them small areas of land around an existing impoverished settlement. Those lands were often the undesirable, arid, isolated ones no one else wanted. On quite a few, no one (including no Indians) actually did live for many years -- they worked at wage labor in towns, and the San Francisco Bay area. For the Pomos, land was purchased in Lake, Sonoma, and Mendocino counties (i.e. little pieces of their own land was bought back yet again).

The Pomos, in the 20th century, took a strong early role in legal actions to try to achieve some kind of rights, and to maintain their land in very hostile-to-Indians territory. In 1907, Ethan Anderson (Eastern Pomo) won a court case that gave non-reservation Indians the right to vote -- a right they didn't get in some states until the 1960's.

Some time before World War I, Lake County Pomo parents challenged local school districts, which would not admit Indian children (who were taken from their families -- if caught -- and sent to distant BIA boarding schools). Though the case was won, the California school board exercised a then legal option to establish separate public schools for Indian children. As has been mentioned on Elsie Allen's page, Pomos of th California Indian Brotherhood undertook and financed legal actions against the segregated schools (1923), and discriminatory service in Ukiah public businesses (1948). They were ahead of everyone else -- other Indians, other, much larger minorities -- in these actions.

In the early 1950's, for the U.S. government it was "termination time", a move seen by all Indians as another land grab, since it would remove reservation land from its protected federal status. In California, the Rancheria Act of 1958 said that all rancherias (reservations) would be offered the choice of termination or not. The BIA went on a campaign to sell the idea to tribes to

vote to terminate themselves. The BIA promised the Pomos (and others) that if they voted to terminate, the BIA would make road improvements, bring in water and electricity and generally bring the infrastructure of these isolated, arid, impoverished lands up to the same conditions as the surrounding white lands. The alternative -- as most everyone saw it -- was they would be terminated anyway, so the Pomo rancherias reluctantly voted to terminate themselves, so that their lands might be improved to a point where they could support themslves in a money economy. Terminations continued through the 1960's.

The inevitable result was the loss of most of the small bits of land that had been rancheria-reservations. The BIA did not make the improvements in water, power, transportation, etc., that might have enabled some of them to compete, as farmers, with whites around them, and of course the terminated lands wer vulnerable to tax loss, improvident or subsistence-mandated sales, too, as with any allotted lands. In some cases, the BIA sold these lands and distributed the (small) amounts of money realized. Several Pomo bands successfully sued to reverse their terminations. The largest such lawsuit was filed in the early 1980's by Tilly Hardwicke, a member of the Pinoleville Pomo (Mendocino county). It became a class action, representing 17 similarly-situated terminated rancherias.

Victory in 1983 restored federal reservation status -- but not the lands lost in the interim -- to 17 rancherias (including many but not all Pomos). Pinoleville (located in what its tribal council calls "the verdant California wine country") theoretically has 99 acres, but only 55 is owned by Indians, the rest is now owned by whites. "Though still quite small, Pinoleville figures prominently in the larger struggle for Indian rights and recognition," the tribal council says proudly. "The tribal government currently employs 5 tribal members. Given the small rancheria population (70) and workforce (15 adults), this qualifies it as a major employment source." The band is currently investigating how it might tap into the rich tourists who currently cruise the wine country, for its major economic development effort.

Scotts Valley of Lakeport regained reservation staus, but had in the terminated period lost all its land. Two rooms in a tribal member's home "offer community facilities". The General Council says: "Clear Lake State Park and Lake Mendocino offer recreational opportunities. The rancheria, however, has as yet no capability to prosper from this generated tourism." Potter Valley with 200 tribal members has only 10 acres left. These were the people rounded up on death marches to Covelo in 1850, who escaped from Round Valley back to Potter Valley in 1856. The 10 acres is what remains (after termination) of the 96 acres they had before it. There are 3 wells, a pumphouse, and a ranch house (that now serves as tribal office). Goals are land base and providing housing for tribal members.

Coyote Valley -- whose people were death-marched to Fort Bragg, then interned at Round Valley, bought land in the 1870's and 80's as near as possible to their old homesites. This was lost to mortgage foreclosure in 1928. 101 acres was purchased under the 1909 act for landless Pomo, but no one lived there because there was no water and the soils were poor, until the hard times of the late 1930's Depression, when some families built houses and maintained small gardens. In 1949, the Army Corps of Engineers planned a dam there, and by 1957, the last families had to leave. In 1976, they individually won re-federated status (but no land) in a federal court case. 58 acres was later purchased in Redwood Valley. The tribe has entered into a gaming agreement with the state, submitted to the BIA for review. The band has a 5-year lease on the Army Corps of Engineers Interpretive Center at Lake Mendocino, where it presents programs for tourists.

 ${f M}$ iddletown in Lake county opened a casino in 1994. They have 100 acres close to Santa Rosa with a workforce (adults) of just 3 people.

Sulphur Bank/Elm Indian Colony has 50 acres. They are currently trying to regain ownership of their traditional land on 54-acre Rattlesnake Island, located very close offshore from their Clear Lake shoreland. The band says: "This has been sacred ground for centuries. The island continues to serve as an important source for many foods and medicines of value to the tribe. In the past, owners have not always allowed the tribe to conduct ceremonies or gather herbs. Rattlesnake Island is currently for sale, and the tribe, with the aid of California Legal Services, is exploring options for acquiring the title." In May, 1970, the Pomo occupied Rattlesnake Island, to prevent Boise Cascade from developing a condo on the burial grounds and sacred ground there.

Indians of All Tribes, who were <u>occupying the abandoned federal prison island of Alcatraz</u> in San Francisco Bay at the time, sent a delegation to meet with the Pomos on Rattlesnake Island. Here's a description, written by Mohawk poet Peter Blue Cloud, in a little book, *Alcatraz Is Not*

an Island (Wingbow Press, 1972, long out of print):

"The Pomo Indians at Clear Lake are witnessing the destruction of their sacred lake. The waters are no longer clear but murky, as they became polluted from the wastes of the thousands of homes, resorts, and new subdivisions. Gas-powered boats race all over the lake. Bulldozers are eating at the base of sacred Mt. Konoceti to create more housing, mountainsides are being stripped to provide gravel. Neat plots of plastic grass and shrubs are being laid out in a Disneyland nightmare.

"At Sulphur Banks Rancheria, the El-Em Band of Pomos have watched the rape and destruction of their lands since the coming of the whiteman. Very close to their homes is a small lake of sulphur-infested waters left by a mining company. It is a pit hundreds of feet deep which lies above the level of Clear Lake less than 200 feet from the shore [contaminating the lake by seepage]. All around this contaminated water, lies a stripped and barren land, plundered for mercury, to supply two world wars. Very few things grow here.

¹¹ A hundred feet offshore from Sulphur Banks is Rattlesnake Island, ancient burial ground and village site of the El-Em Pomo. It is a rocky island, thickly overgrown. It has always been a part of their lands.

"Boise Cascade, the giant lumber and subdivision monster, suddenly appeared on the scene to say Rattlesnake Island was theirs, and that they were going to subdivide it. May 1, 1970, the Pomo Indians moved onto the island and stated their intention to stay."

That was 1970; 26 years later, they're still trying.

4900 people IDed themselves as Pomo in the 1990 census. The following are currently-recognized (federal reservation) rancherias whose populations are entirely (or substantially) Pomo: *Mendocino County*: Hopland, Guidiville, Pinoleville, Coyote Valley, Redwood Valley, Sherwood Valley, Manchester/Point Arena, Potter Valley and Round Valley (Little Lake band). *Sonoma County*: Cloverdale, Dry Creek, Stewarts Point, Lytton. *Lake County*: Robinson, Upper Lake, Big Valley, Elem/Sulpher Bank, Scotts Valley, Middletown; *Glenn County* Grindstone. There remain others -- Yokaya has been mentioned -- which still seek re-federalization. The land bases of thse tiny, scattered sites vary from 0 to 177 acres and populations from 15 to about 400. Probably about 2/3 of tribal members do not live on tribal land.

Y ou can buy many Pomo books on-line at Amazon.com bookstore. I have prepared a list of all that they carry. You can select from a big list <u>here</u> and click your choices as you go to Amazon.com for an invoice

Continue -- Warm Springs Dam -- drowning (and rescue) of Basket Plants Valley

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CREDITS: Feather baskets and awl: Smithsonian Book of North American Indians Before the Coming of the Europeans, Philip Kopper,

Smithsonian Books, 1986. Map: adapted from Tiller's Guide to Indian Country, the publicly available version of Tiller's ECDA guide; Bow and Arrow Publishing, 1996, 800/895-8668. String of clamshell disk-beads from the dust jacket of The Native American Look Book, a project of the Brooklyn Museum, The New Press, 1996. Benson magnesite basket fron NMAI, chosen by Susan Billy to illustrate her essay in All Roads Are Good, Smithsonian, 1994. String of disk beads and canoe-shaped 19th-century feather basket from the Brooklyn Museum, photographed in the children's book The Native American Look Book, The New Press, 1996. Both photos were enhanced and colorized by me.

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