Finding Aid for the California Indian Baskets, ca. 1800s-1900s

Processed by Fowler Museum staff; Machine-readable finding aid created by Caroline Cubé
The Fowler Museum at UCLA
Box 951549
University of California, Los Angeles
Los Angeles, California 90095-1549
Phone: (415) 825-4361
Fax: (415) 206-7007
Email: office@arts.ucla.edu
URL: https://www.fowler.ucla.edu/
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Descriptive Summary

Title: California Indian Baskets

Date (inclusive): ca. 1800s-1900s

Collection number: n/a

Collector: University of California, Los Angeles. The Fowler Museum at UCLA, Archaeology Collections Facility

Extent: n/a

Abstract: The Fowler Museum at UCLA's collection includes baskets made by California American Indians in the 19th and early 20th century. The baskets represent works from the Panamint Shoshone (Timbisha Shoshone Tribe), a western division of the Shoshonean peoples, located east of the Sierra Divide in Central California; the Pomo Indians located on the Northern coast of California; the Shasta Indians located on the Oregon border of California; and the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk tribes in Northwestern California.

Repository: University of California, Los Angeles. The Fowler Museum at UCLA, Archaeology Collections Facility
Los Angeles, California 90095-1549

Language: English.

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Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], California Indian Baskets, The Fowler Museum at UCLA, Archaeology Collections Facility, University of California, Los Angeles.

History
The Fowler Museum at UCLA's collection includes baskets made by California American Indians in the 19th and early 20th century. The baskets represent works from the Panamint Shoshone (Timbisha Shoshone Tribe), a western division of the Shoshonean peoples, located east of the Sierra Divide in Central California; the Pomo Indians located on the Northern coast of California; the Shasta Indians located on the Oregon border of California; and the Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk tribes in Northwestern California.

Native Californians made baskets traditionally for a variety of functional and ceremonial purposes. Most baskets in the Fowler Museum collections were made in the early to mid 20th century when basket-making became a significant source of income, for sale to tourists and collectors. Trading posts and hotel gift shops might have hundreds of baskets for sale at a time, without ever asking for the name of the maker. The unfortunate result is that it is now difficult or impossible to determine exact tribal affiliation of the maker, let alone the actual weaver's identity.

The majority of the Fowler Museum's Native California basket collections were made by Hupa, Yurok, and Karuk peoples living in small villages in an area of Northwestern California bisected by the Trinity and Klamath Rivers. These baskets are intricately woven using twining and open twining techniques and “false embroidery.” Basket types include: acorn bowls, women's ceremonial caps, men's work caps, storage and large burden baskets, and gift / trinket baskets. Bowls used for serving and eating acorn soup are watertight. The acorn bowl and ceremonial caps, though similar in design and size can be separated by one defining factor: the acorn bowl has a raised stitch around the middle made with bear grass. Trinket baskets were made for trade only to non-Indian peoples and served no functional purpose. Either California hazel, willow sticks, or pine root were used in the construction of the baskets. Willow or spruce roots served to weave the sticks together. Woodwardia, maidenhair fern (also known as black fern) dyed with alder root, elk horn, and bear grass provide color and design. Traditional designs represented include motifs such as: flint, obsidian blade, friendship, snake nose, snail's trail, God's Eye or Morning Star, and stacked wood. Due to the popular demand and exposure to new products over time weavers created new and innovative designs, such as borrowing designs from the linoleum flooring in their homes.

Shasta Indians lived near Mount Shasta in Northern California. Their basketry is made of tule, dyed tule, bear grass, and cane with nettle or flax cord starts. Dyed porcupine quills, yarn, and glass beads may adorn the baskets. Twined baskets are their specialty. Traditional basket types include cooking baskets, storing baskets, ceremonial gift baskets, gambling trays, cone shaped burden baskets, and hats.

The Pomo Indians were traditionally comprised of over seventy-two independent tribes living in Northern California along the Mendocino and Sonoma County coastal region. Their especially elaborate twined and coiled type baskets were made
from sedge (white), redbud (red), willow sticks, and bulrush (black) were often adorned with feathers and clamshells. Among the Pomo, men as well as women wove baskets. The historic Shoshone Indians occupied territory in California, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming. The ancestors of the Panamint Shoshone, also known as the Timbisha Shoshone, came into their homeland in present day Death Valley, California over a thousand years ago. Men made bows and arrows and hunted bighorn sheep, rabbits, and lizards. Women harvested fruits, seed, and plants such as pinyon pine nuts and mesquite beans, and made baskets.

Indexing Terms
The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Subjects
Indian baskets--North America.
Basketwork.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok storage basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; willow or spruce root; maidenhair fern.
Design: obsidian.
This storage basket was probably made for sale. It is larger and sturdier than trinket baskets.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cap 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass, spruce or willow roots; willow or hazel sticks; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder roots.
Design: obsidian blade.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok storage basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: black fern; bear grass; spruce or willow roots.
Design: motif is known by two names, God's Eye or Morning Star.
This storage basket was probably made for sale. It is larger and sturdier than trinket baskets.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: maidenhair or black fern; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder bark; bear grass; willow roots or hazel sticks.
Design: obsidian blade.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and probably made to be sold. Traditionally baskets this small were used to store tobacco.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: maidenhair or black fern; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder bark; bear grass; willow roots or hazel sticks.
Design: obsidian blade.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and probably made to be sold. Traditionally baskets this small were used to store tobacco.
Hupa, Karok, or Yurok woman's cap 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass, willow or hazel sticks; spruce or willow roots; maidenhair fern.
Design: obsidian with worm's trail.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cap 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; maidenhair fern; willow root; willow or hazel sticks.
Design: snake nose and worm's trail.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok storage basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass, willow or hazel sticks; spruce or willow roots.
Design: Flint or obsidian.
This basket was probably made for sale as a storage basket. It is larger and sturdier than trinket baskets.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok basket 1959

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok large lidded trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; spruce or willow root; willow or hazel sticks; maidenhair fern; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder root.
Design: friendship.
The fact this basket has a lid and handles may indicate it is a large trinket basket & probably made for sale. It is the size of the traditional cooking basket.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cap 19th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; maidenhair fern; willow root; willow or hazel sticks.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder bark; spruce or willow roots; willow or hazel sticks.
Design: not traditional, may be based on a linoleum floor design.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and was probably made to be sold.

Wiyot man's hat 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: spruce or willow root; willow or hazel sticks; bear grass.
Design: simple pattern without named motif.
The simple design patterns indicate this was worn as an everyday work cap.
Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; maidenhair fern; spruce or willow roots.
Design: flint.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and was probably made to be sold. Traditional baskets this small were used to store tobacco.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket with lid 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; spruce or willow roots; willow or hazel sticks.
Design: snake nose; unusual black "button" on bottom of basket is wrapped with maidenhair fern.
The elaborate decorative design and the lid, indicate this is a trinket basket and was probably made to be sold.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cap 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: woodwardia fern dyed with alder bark; bear grass; maidenhair fern; spruce or willow roots.
Design: old obsidian blade.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: maidenhair fern; bear grass; hazel sticks; willow or spruce roots.
Design: stacked wood.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and was probably made to be sold.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: maidenhair fern; bear grass; hazel sticks; willow or spruce roots.
Design: friendship.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and was probably made to be sold.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cap 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: bear grass; woodwardia fern dyed with alder root; maidenhair fern.
Design: obsidian with worm's trail.
Worn as a ceremonial cap.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok acorn bowl 19th - early 20th century
Scope and Content Note
Materials: willow or hazel sticks; spruce roots; bear grass.
Design: friendship (triangular motif).
The raised decorative band around the circumference of the basket indicates it was made to be used as a food bowl to serve acorn mush.
Wiyot food basket 19th - early 20th century  ark:/13030/hb429008bd
Scope and Content Note
Materials: willow or hazel sticks; spruce root; bear grass.
Design: obsidian blade.
The raised decorative band around the circumference of the basket indicates it was made to be used as a food bowl to serve acorn mush.

Hupa, Karok, or Yurok cooking basket 19th - early 20th century  ark:/13030/hb9h4nb9cw
Scope and Content Note
Materials: willow or hazel sticks; spruce roots; bear grass.
Design: adaptation of a design used on hats for little girls.
The raised decorative band around the circumference of the basket indicates it was made to be used as a food bowl to make acorn mush.

Pomo basket with feathers and shell beads undated  ark:/13030/hb200007nv
Pomo feathered headdress undated  ark:/13030/hb529009sx
Hupa, Karok, or Yurok trinket basket 19th - early 20th century  ark:/13030/hb8q501215
Scope and Content Note
Materials: maidenhair fern; Woodwardia fern dyed with alder bark; bear grass; spruce or willow roots; willow or hazel sticks.
Design: elkhorn, raised decorative rim is not traditional.
The elaborate decorative design indicates this is a trinket basket and probably made to be sold. Traditional baskets this small were used to store tobacco.

Panamint Indian basket undated  ark:/13030/hb6779p502
Shasta basket undated  ark:/13030/hb296nb5m3
Pomo basket with shell beads undated  ark:/13030/hb709nb8km
Pomo miniature basket undated  ark:/13030/hb2w10084x
Pomo oval basket undated  ark:/13030/hb8m3nb8tg
Panamint Indian basket undated  ark:/13030/hb7z09p473
Panamint rectangular basket undated  ark:/13030/hb25800719