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## Roscinda Nolasquez Remembered



**ROSCINDA NOLASQUEZ** (1892-1987), the oldest of southern California's Cupeño Indians, died February 4, 1987, at the age of 94. She was buried in the old Cupa village cemetery at Warner Springs.

Mrs. Nolasquez was the last survivor of the government removal that brought her people from Cupa to the Pala Indian Reservation in 1903. In her later years, she worked with a variety of linguists, anthropologists, and historians to help preserve what she knew of the Cupeño language and culture.

She was born April 3, 1892, at Cupa, where her family home still stands. Her father, Salvador Nolasquez (1861-1934), was a prominent Cupeño leader at the turn of the century. His father, Silverio Nolasquez (d. 1910) was a Yaqui Indian who settled at Cupa in the 1850s.

After the death of her mother Candelaria (Chutnicut) Nolasquez in 1895, Roscinda Nolasquez was raised in large part by her grandmother, Mercedes Nolasquez (d. 1916).

From her, Mrs. Nolasquez learned much of her people's history.

In 1903, following a U.S. Supreme Court decision that deprived the Cupeño of their ancestral homes at Cupa, 11-year-old Roscinda Nolasquez joined her people on the long, hot, three-day trip to the new Pala Indian Reservation where she lived for much of the rest of her life.

Mrs. Nolasquez attended school at the government Indian School at Cupa and then at the Sherman Institute in Riverside. After leaving the Sherman Institute she worked at various places, including several years at the Warner Springs Resort that had been built amid the remains of Cupa. There, she was forbidden to talk to the guests about her village.

Born at a time when many of her people's traditions still survived, as the years passed she was keenly aware of the loss of those ancient ways, and sought to preserve what she knew of them.

Probably the last native speaker of the Cupeño language, she was especially sought after as an informant by linguists such as Jane Hill and Roderick Jacobs--both of whom she held in high regard.

Based in part on her extensive work with Mrs. Nolasquez in the 1960s, Jane Hill compiled our most important collection of Cupeño oral histories and songs, *Mulu'wetam: The First People* (Malki Museum Press, 1973).

During the 1960s and 70s, Mrs. Nolasquez taught classes in the Cupeño language at Pala where she delighted in seeing the young people learning more about their heritage. She also worked towards the founding of the Cupa Cultural Center at Pala in 1974, hoping it would serve as a focal point for the pre-

servation of the rich past of the Cupeño tribe.

She remained in good health until well into her 92nd year, but even as her strength began to fail, she never lost her desire to see her people's history recorded for the future. She had a deep concern for keeping the facts of their history straight, and only contempt for those who would try to distort them.

As a historian, I found her recollections especially valuable. She had a remarkable memory for names and family relationships, and gave me an interesting perspective on many events she witnessed.

We also took several trips together back to her homeland. One summer day she even induced me to drive her high above her old village to the rocky peak of Hot Springs

Mountain (*Su'ish Peki*), a powerful, sacred part of her people's world. She was 91 when we made that special journey.

I never succeeded in learning more than a few halting words of Cupeño, but she never gave up trying to teach me. In return, she would ask me to explain English words that she could not understand.

Those dual desires to teach and to learn were Mrs. Nolasquez's greatest strengths. Her legacy to us is a better understanding of her people and their past. But just as we learned from her, she would also expect us to teach others what we know, so that the world she once knew will not be forgotten.

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