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with or without the blessings of the church. The development of the Russian-Indian society in northern California, however, requires further research.

### NOTES

1. Kuskov established Fort Ross in 1812 with a contingent of 25 Russians and some 80 Aleuts. About 1840, some 60 Russians and 80 Aleuts lived at Ross in addition to an unknown number of local Indians.

2. Primary sources for this report were the San Rafael Arcangel Mission Baptismal Register, 1817-1839, and the Chancery Archive of the Archdiocese of San Francisco (Colma, California).

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## A Maidu Acorn Dough Carrier

CRAIG D. BATES

Among the collections of the State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation in Sacramento, is a Maidu acorn dough carrier (Fig. 1). A disposable container used by the Konkow Maidu to transport leached acorn dough, it may well be the sole surviving example of its kind collected at the turn of the century. Its complete description in the State catalog (No. MCS-369-3-SP) record reads "Bread Basket. Maidu. 3 x 11 in. Chico (?)." The "basket" was included in the large

collection of James McCord Stilson, an avid collector of Indian artifacts who lived in the city of Chico. The entire collection was purchased by the State of California sometime around 1930. Stilson was apparently well acquainted with the Indian people of the local Chico Rancheria, and his collection included artifacts from local Maidu as well as many other western North American groups (Bruce Bernstein, personal communication 1982).

The piece under discussion consists of a hoop, ovoid in shape, of an unidentified, unpeeled shoot. The hoop is approximately 15.0 cm. x 30.0 cm. and stretches two net-like weavings of the inner bark of the big leaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*).<sup>1</sup> Sandwiched between these woven layers is a thick layer of leaves (approximately 5.0 cm. thick) that are now largely decomposed, but appear to be from the big leaf maple. A short piece of maple bark is tied to two points on one side of the hoop, making a handle.

This acorn dough carrier is nearly identical in construction and appearance to one described to me more than a decade ago by Henry Keaala Azbill (1896-1973). An aged member of the *Michoopda* Maidu, he was born and reared at the Indian Rancheria located on John Bidwell's Rancho Chico, today within the boundaries of the city of Chico. Azbill spoke his mother's language, Konkow, as well as *Michoopda*, and was conversant in neighboring Maidu and Nisenan dialects.

He stated that he took an early interest in the culture of his people, but it was not until late in life that he began actively to create traditional objects of personal adornment and ceremonial regalia, as well as to work with persons interested in Maidu culture. In about 1969 he told me of his having seen an acorn dough carrier made and used, and taught me the construction techniques involved in producing such a piece.

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Fig. 1. Maidu acorn dough carrier. 15.0 cm. x 30.0 cm. Catalog number MCS-369-3-SP. Courtesy State of California, Department of Parks and Recreation. Photograph by Curt Stevenot.

Sometime around 1906, Azbill had traveled into the foothills of Butte County with his family to attend a *Wedah*, a spring ceremony that was marked by a large feast and gambling among the foothill Konkow. En route to the celebration, which was probably at the village of "Bald Rock," they stopped to pick up two of his mother's aged relatives, Grandpa Jim Dixie and his wife Sally. While not actually grandparents, Mrs. Dixie was related to Henry's mother, Mary Azbill, and Jim Dixie was from a Patwin village near Colusa which Henry called *waiatelli*.<sup>2</sup> The words *muto* (grandfather) and *koto* (grandmother), by which Henry addressed the

Dixies, were terms of endearment and respect.

As they arrived at the Dixie cabin, Henry's *koto* had just finished leaching a full sand basin or *bistu* of black oak acorn flour. It was fully drained, and like acorn flour at this stage, resembled a thick, stiff dough. She planned on taking this to the *wedah*, and since carrying the five or more gallons of mush which the gallon or so of dough would produce was a difficult proposition at best, they decided to take the dough.

Jim Dixie went to the nearby creek and cut a straight willow (*Salix* sp.) shoot about a half inch in diameter at the butt end and three or four feet in length. He bent this into

a circular form a foot or so in diameter. He then stripped the bark off nearby saplings, which Henry remembered as being willow.

With this bark he tied the shoot into a circular form, and then quickly wove a "net-like arrangement" across the hoop with more bark. Taking large leaves from a nearby sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*) tree and washing them in the creek, he arranged a thick bed-like layer across the net. Grandma Sally brought the leached acorn dough, and this was made into a loaf-like mass and placed in the center of the leaves. Jim Dixie took more of the washed leaves, covered the dough with a thick layer of these, and using more bark wove a net-like arrangement over the leaves, thus forming a firm bundle which encased the stiff acorn dough in the center. Using still more bark, he quickly tied on a makeshift handle with which the carrier was suspended from a saddlehorn on the trip to the village, a few miles away.

Henry remembered that after arriving at the village they removed the dough from the container, and then stone-boiled the acorn mush in the usual three-rod coiled soup baskets used by the Maidu for this purpose. As they tossed the dough carrier aside, Henry retrieved it and made plans to take it home. His mother disapproved, and told Henry that it simply wasn't worth keeping as you could not use it again, and it would dry out. Henry remarked to me that he was "just a bit spoiled" by his grandparents, and, as in other instances, at this point Grandpa Dixie came to the rescue. "Why, if the boy wants it, he can have it," he told Mary and, taking Henry aside, they went to the creek, washed the used leaves, repacked the carrier to make it look as though it was still full of acorn dough, and carefully reweave the bark. Henry happily took the container home with him and stored it in a trunk with other treasured possessions, including a bow and quiver full of arrows also made by Grandpa Dixie. Unfortunately, after

his mother's death in 1932 the trunk and its contents disappeared.

Henry described the container as "an emergency sort of thing, made from materials at hand when the need arose." Once used, they were discarded, and were accorded no other value in native society, much as present western society views the ubiquitous paper bag. He was not surprised that such objects did not exist in collections of Maidu artifacts. Although made by his Patwin grandfather, Henry considered the acorn dough carrier he once possessed as representative of those used by his mother's foothill Konkow relatives.

Both the techniques shown to me by Henry and the specimen under discussion share similar construction characteristics. The netting-like weaving follows no real prescribed method, although the first strips of bark tied to the frame make for warps in some cases, to which other strips are wrapped around once. This technique is often referred to as "lattice-work construction" (Adovasio 1977: 154-155), and was used in the connecting of carved wood splints among the Konkow in making combs (Riddell 1978: 376). In other parts of the carrier, the knotless-netting technique is found much used by the Maidu in the production of head nets (Dixon 1905: 143) and bags (Riddell 1978: 377), as well as among the Pomo in making similar bags (Barrett 1952: 280).

These same weaving techniques are found on a specimen at the Oakland Museum (Catalog No. 16-1658), which resembles the unfinished dough carrier in that it is a hoop with the bark net stretched across it. It was collected during the fall of 1911 by C. P. Wilcomb in the Feather River Canyon at the Konkow village known as Dogwood Rancheria. It is described in the catalog as "Frame, with coarse network of maple bark, used in making manzanita cider." The use of such a frame, for leaching the sweetness from pounded manzanita berries that had been mixed

with water to make a stiff dough, is described by Dixon (1905:189-190):

A rough frame of willow large enough to cover the top of a soup-basket is then made, and cross-strands of bark twined about it so as to form a rude, flat, open-work tray. On this a few large leaves are laid, and the mass of dough placed on these in the shape of a truncated cone from fifteen to twenty centimetres in diameter and from ten to fifteen centimetres high. A small depression is made in the top of the cone, and then the whole affair placed over a soup-basket. Water is poured into the depression in the top of the conical heap of manzanita-dough, and, as it slowly soaks through and drips into the basket below, more is poured in, and the process continued until all the flavor has been dissolved out of the berries.

Two archaeological pieces, similar in both construction and appearance to the ethnographic examples described here, were found at a Pueblo III site in Canyon de Chelly, Arizona. Made with willow hoops, the weaving materials are of *Yucca baccata*. Their use is unknown, and apparently they are not duplicated in other collections of similar materials (Adovasio 1977:154).

Such unique items poorly represented in ethnographic collections, make one consider the prevalence of such disposable or emergency containers prior to contact with non-Indians. Similar containers made of tule have been reported for the Northern Paiute (Wheat 1967:84-86), but the early replacement of traditional bags and even burden baskets by commercial flour sacks and burlap bags among the Sierra Miwok (Burrows 1971:29, 32) leads to speculation on the early disappearance of quickly made containers among any number of native groups. Today, with the preparation of native foodstuffs no longer an everyday occurrence among most native Californians, and precontact lifeways having been disrupted for more than a century, we can only ponder on the variety and numbers of

these sorts of carriers that could have been produced by native Californians.

## NOTES

1. The inner bark of the big leaf maple was used by the Maidu for a variety of other objects including *yokoli*-offering flags consisting of tassels of maple bark, tassels held by women in various dances, aprons and two-piece skirts worn by women, as well as false hair ornamenting a female effigy used in the annual mourning ceremony (Dixon 1905:161, 255, 319-320; Riddell 1978:375).

2. Probably the village of *wa'itere*, near Colusa (Kroeber 1932:259).

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