



VALENE L.  
**SMITH**   
**MUSEUM**  
OF ANTHROPOLOGY

# Unbroken Traditions:

BASKETWEAVERS OF THE MEADOWS-BAKERS  
FAMILY IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

*Virtual Tour*

# Tour Outline

- Virtual Tour Learning and Activity Links
- Introduction to the Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology
- CSU, Chico Land Acknowledgment Statement
- Indigenous California basketry traditions
- The Meadows-Baker Family
- Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- Basketry Materials, Techniques and Tools
- Gathering, Processing, Storing and Cooking Acorns
- Museums and Decolonization
- Thanking our Consultants
- Film Link: *Bound to Tradition*
- More Resources for Learning



# Learning and Activity Links

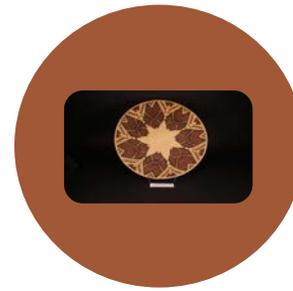
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FAMILY ACTIVITIES

[Turtle Weaving](#)

[Animal Tales](#)



K-12

[Fire Ecology](#)

[Scavenger Hunt](#)



COLLEGE COURSES

[Virtual Tour Questions](#)

# Welcome to the Museum!



The Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology is located on the campus of California State University, Chico. For fifty years the museum has been a place of learning for students and visitors of all ages!

Our exhibits are created by students in museum studies classes. This exhibit was curated by Meegan Sims and Coral Doyle, who are earning their Masters Degree in Anthropology with an Emphasis in Museum Studies. Meegan and Coral worked in consultation with Native American consultants, curators and directors to create the exhibit.

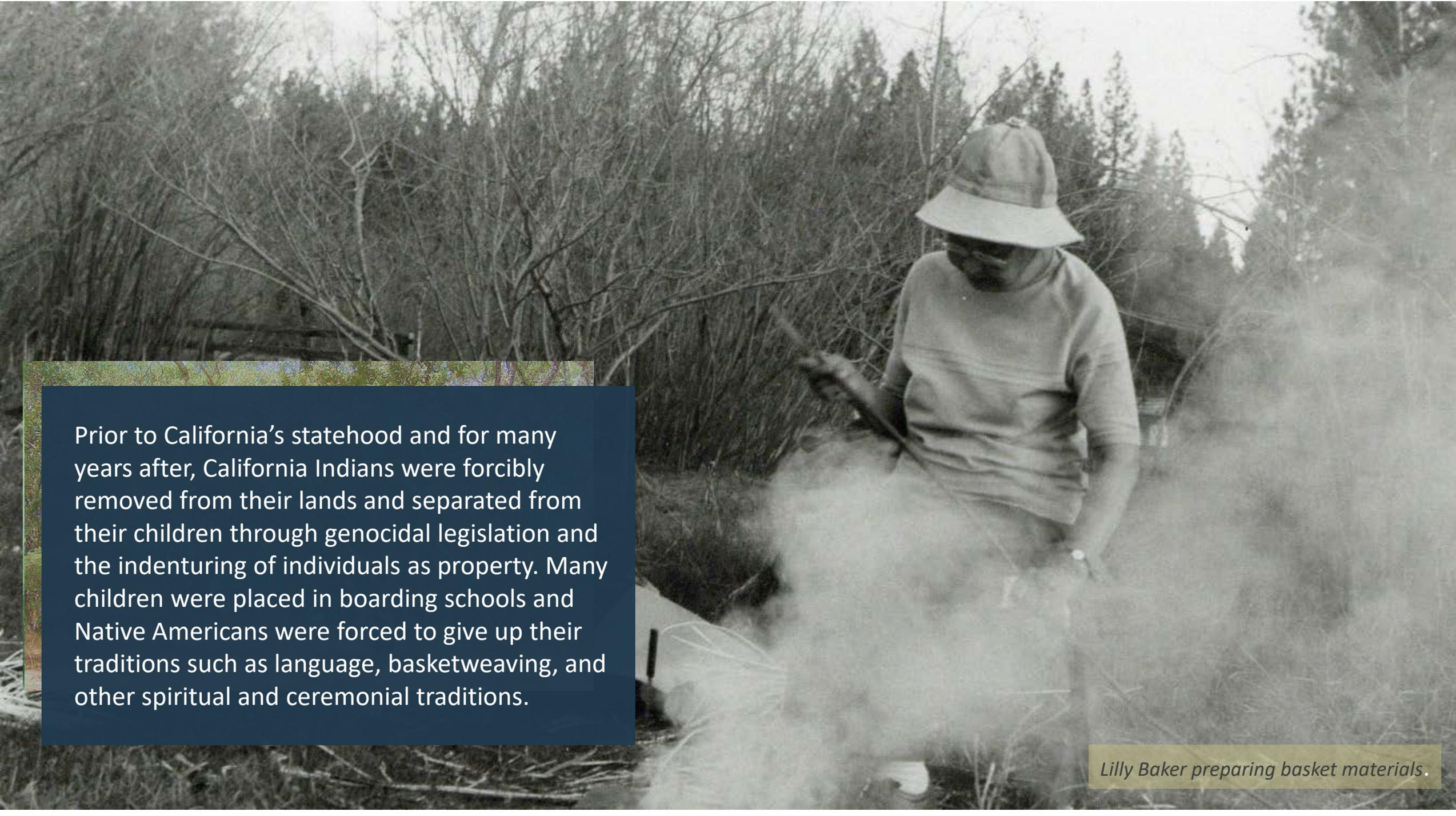




We acknowledge and are mindful that CSU, Chico, stands on lands that were originally occupied by the first people of this area, the Mechoopda, and we recognize their distinctive spiritual relationship with this land and the waters that run through campus.

We are humbled that our campus resides upon sacred lands that once sustained the Mechoopda people for centuries.

Image of Chico Creek on the campus of CSU, Chico, courtesy of Jason Halley.



Prior to California's statehood and for many years after, California Indians were forcibly removed from their lands and separated from their children through genocidal legislation and the indenturing of individuals as property. Many children were placed in boarding schools and Native Americans were forced to give up their traditions such as language, basketweaving, and other spiritual and ceremonial traditions.

*Lilly Baker preparing basket materials.*

A close-up photograph of a person's hands weaving a basket. The person is wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt. They are using a wooden loom and a piece of light-colored string. The basket being woven is dark brown with a textured pattern. The background is slightly blurred, showing a wooden table and some other items. A semi-transparent dark brown box with white text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

In spite of devastating intergenerational trauma, vital traditions such as basketweaving, ceremonies and language, to name a few, continue today.

Today, basketry continues to be a dynamic cultural tradition for many Indigenous peoples in California.

Through basketry, basketweavers express cultural traditions and values, ecological knowledge, artistic vision, personal, familial, tribal history and more.



*Image of a 2018 basketry workshop courtesy of the California Indian Basketweavers Association.*



For many Native American groups in California, baskets play an integral role in their ceremonies and daily life.

Can you name something that can be used for harvesting, storing, processing, cooking and serving nuts and seeds, as well as carrying babies, holding water, ceremony, gifts, hats, hunting, fishing, and more?



Hint, hint...

*Basket made by Lucy Baker.*



## Types of Baskets

Baskets have multiple uses. The different types of baskets include: burden baskets, gathering baskets, seedbeaters, basketry traps, storage baskets, mortar hoppers, winnowing, sifting and parching trays, leaching baskets, cooking baskets, feast baskets, water bottles, women's hats, cradleboards, gift baskets, ceremonial baskets and more.

Baskets, from left to right, bowl made by Jennie Meadows, large cooking basket (Miwok, basketweaver unknown), small bowl by Polly Jackson, tray by Kate Meadows-McKinney, seedbeater and gathering basket (basketweaver unknown).

Basketry traditions are often passed down through generations. The baskets below were made by Mountain Maidu women of the Meadows-Baker families, spanning multiple generations. Each basket is unique and reveals the basketweaver's personal and cultural connections to the land.



The resiliency, artistry, and wisdom of the Meadows-Baker families are illustrated in their baskets.

Baskets from the Meadows - Baker Extended Family from left to right: bowl (back) by Kate Meadows-Mckinney, bowl (front) by Kate Meadows-Mckinney, tray (center) by Selena Jackson, small bowl (front) by Selena Jackson, large bowl (back) by Selena Jackson.

**Women Weavers of the Meadows-Baker Family**



*Kate*



*Rose*

The master weavers pictured here drew from a deep understanding of ecology, harvesting and processing natural materials, and intricate weaving techniques. This was paired with creative and meaningful basketry design.



*Daisy*



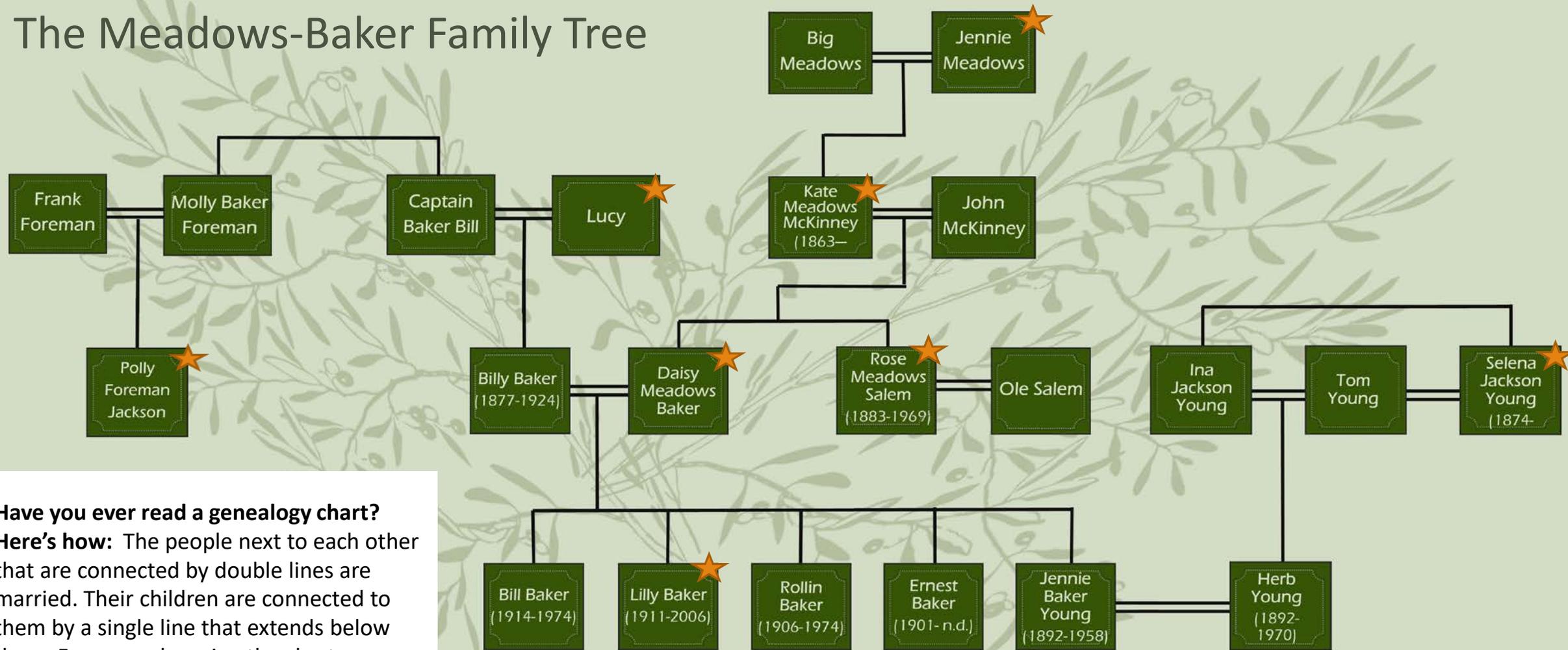
*Lilly*



*Selena*

Pictured from left to right, Daisy Baker, Kate Meadows Mckinney (top middle), Lilly Baker (bottom middle), Rose Meadows (top right), and Selena Jackson (bottom right). *Images courtesy of the Kurtz family.*

# The Meadows-Baker Family Tree



## Have you ever read a genealogy chart?

**Here's how:** The people next to each other that are connected by double lines are married. Their children are connected to them by a single line that extends below them. For example, using the chart, we can see that Billy Baker and Daisy Meadows Baker had five children. The starred individuals are basketweavers from the family with baskets in the exhibit. ★



# Connection to the Land

The journey to becoming a master basketweaver begins with developing a connection to and knowledge of the land from which the plant materials are managed and harvested. The understanding used to manage and gather plant materials for making baskets is part of what is referred to as Traditional Ecological Knowledge, also known as TEK.

**Traditional Ecological Knowledge** consists of gaining intimate knowledge of one's surrounding natural environment, and the passing of that knowledge from generation to generation of practitioners.

Unfortunately, traditional or sacred lands used for retrieving materials for baskets or used for ceremonial purposes have been impacted by pesticides, structures, logging, mining, flooding, displacement, and restricted or prohibited access. Still, traditions have endured, and local Mountain Maidu have formed the Maidu Cultural and Development Group, a nonprofit organization that encourages coordination with the US Forest Service to recognize and work with the Maidu as land stewards. Land management decisions with Maidu include transplanting native plants such as gray willow, eradication of non-native invasive plant species, and managing beargrass in traditional locations for gathering.

**It is important to recognize that lifeways and cultural practices of tribal and indigenous peoples can offer modern societies lessons in the management of ecosystems and natural resources.**



*Butterfly basket, pictured above, made by Lilly Baker.*

# Basketweaving Materials

Some common materials used in basketmaking in Northern California are beargrass, bracken fern root, bulrush root, tule, conifer roots, deergrass, hazel, maidenhair fern, redbud, sedge root, willow, woodwardia fern or giant chain fern.

Other materials, such as feathers, beads, porcupine quills, and commercial fabrics, are used for decorating baskets.

Once plant materials are harvested and processed, they can be kept bundled, shown right, and are ready to use.





## Spotlight on Lilly Baker: Masterweaver and Teacher

(1911-2006)

Lilly Baker came from a long line of skilled Maidu basketmakers. She learned how to gather and process materials and weave from her mother Daisy, and her grandmother, Kate Meadows-McKinney – who learned from her mother, Jennie Meadows.

Yet, her first attempt at making a basket did not go well. Frustrated, Lilly threw out her basket. Her father later found the discarded basket, repaired it, and gave it back to Lilly to finish. Lilly went on to become a skilled basketweaver and became a mentor and taught classes on weaving. She walked in two worlds, contemporary life and that of a traditional Maidu woman.

Lilly's legacy lives on through stories about her life, the baskets she created, and her basketry students.

Lilly Baker selecting materials for a basket.

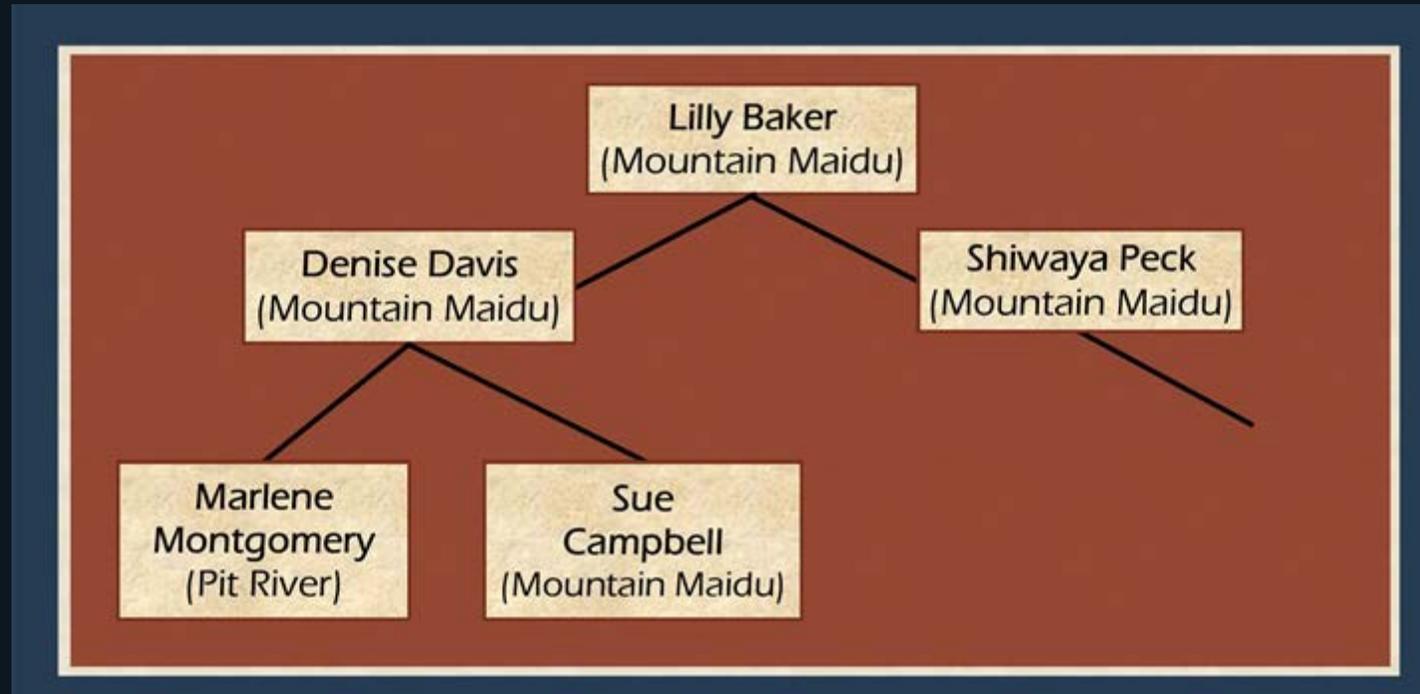


*When you weave a  
design into a basket,  
you put the spirit of  
what you are weaving  
right into the basket.*

*-Lilly Baker*

Lilly Baker working with basketry materials in her home.

# Succession of Teaching Basketweaving



Although Lilly Baker never had children, her legacy still lives on. Her students Denise Davis (Mountain Maidu) and Shiwaya Peck (Mountain Maidu) have continued to weave baskets and teach others about basket making. Sue Campbell (Mountain Maidu) and Marlene Montgomery (Pit River), who were taught by Denise Davis, have also become teachers and advocates.

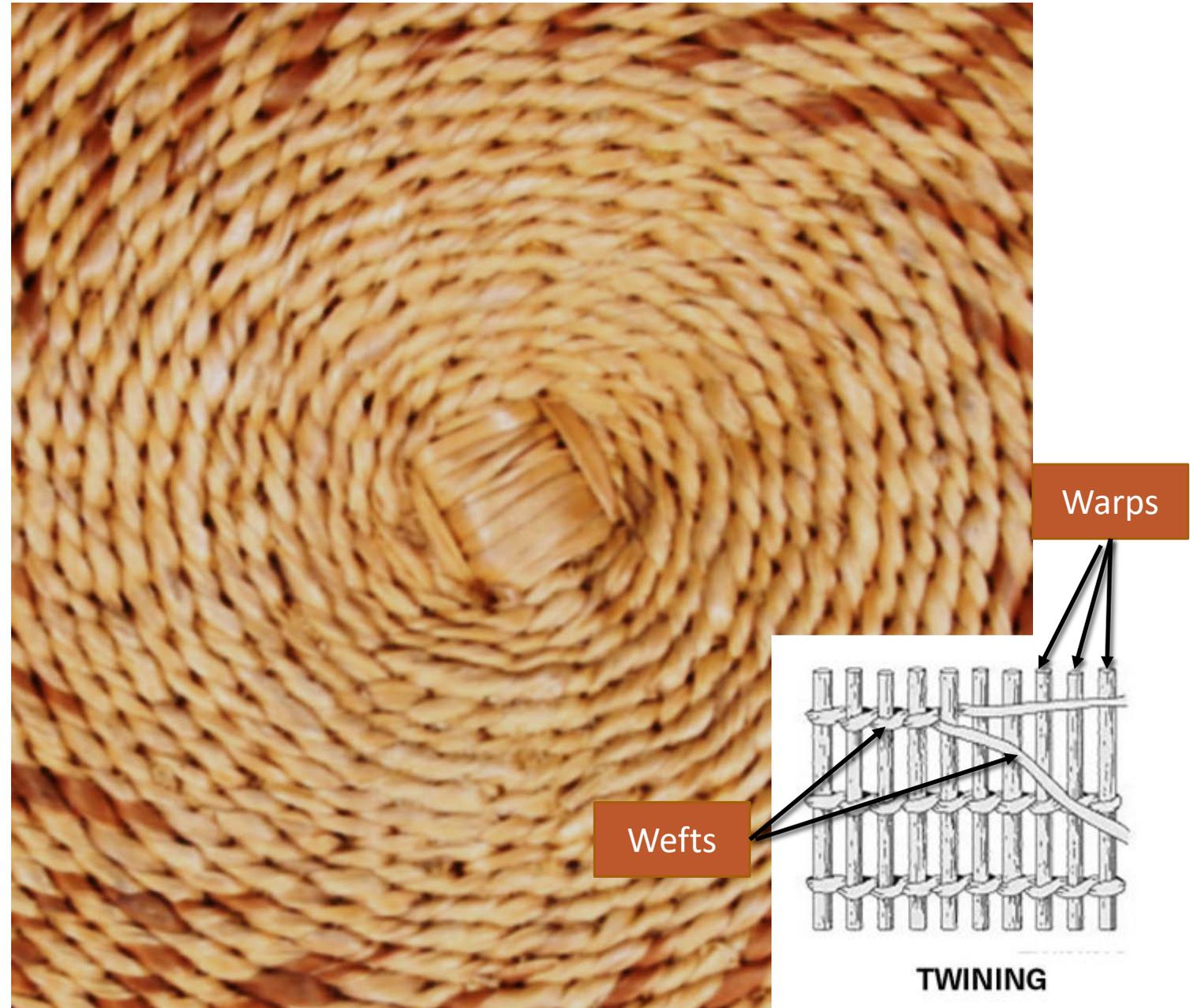
# Basketry

TECHNIQUES,  
TOOLS, AND USE



# Twined Baskets

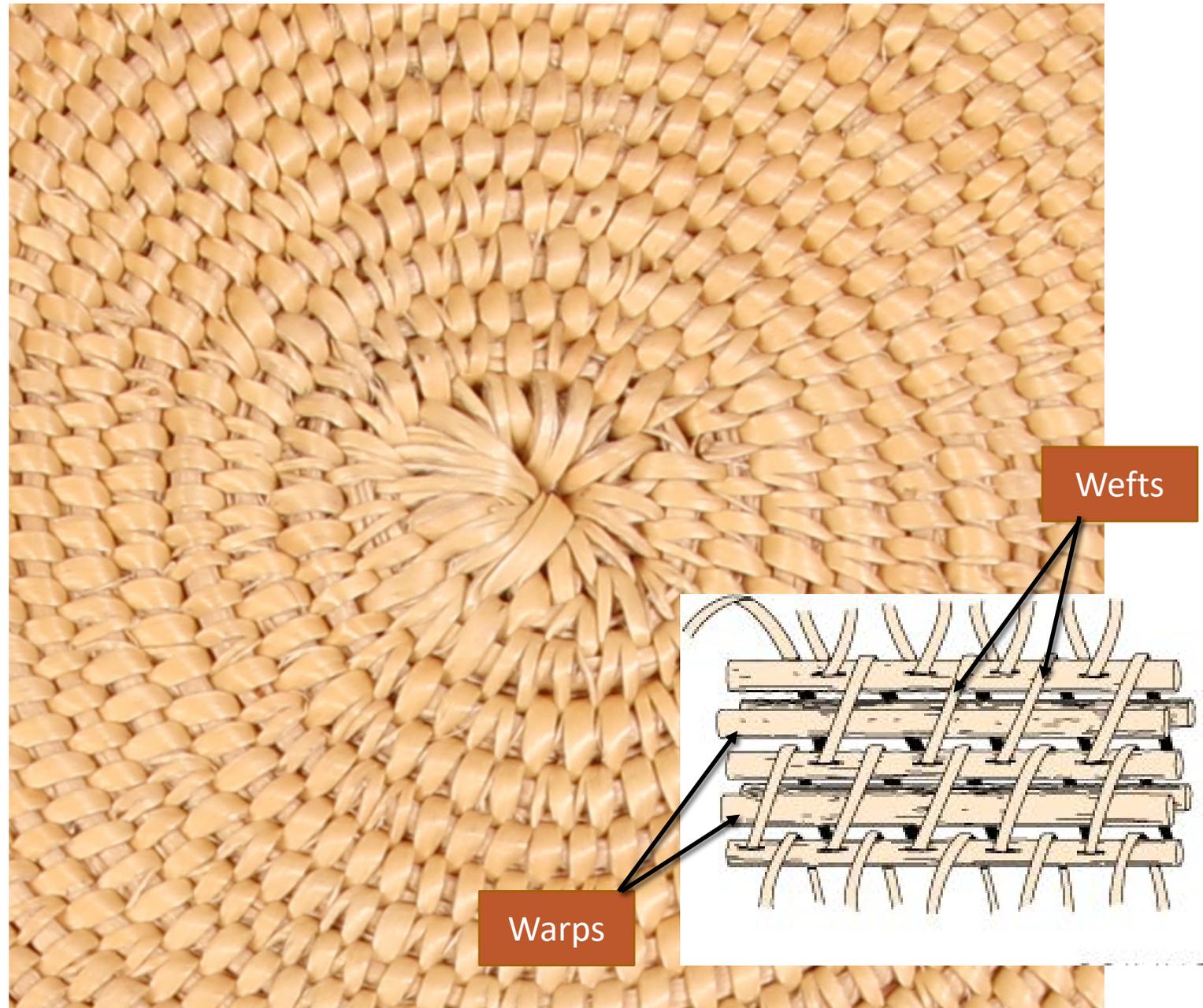
Most of the baskets in the exhibit are twinned or coiled. Twined baskets are made of warps which radiate outward like spokes and wefts that bind the warps together. Warps are the sticks that provide structure to the basket, whereas the wefts are used to secure the sticks in place. Wefts comprise the material that is sewn around the foundation or interior of a basket.



*Twined basket by Kate Meadows-Mckinney.*

# Coiled Baskets

Coiled baskets are made with a foundation that spirals from the base (bottom) to the rim (top). These may be made by coiling the plant material (wefts) around the warps moving counterclockwise or clockwise, depending on the design of the basket, tribal tradition, or a basketweaver's preference.



*Coiled Basket by Jennie Meadows.*

## Lilly Baker's Tools

In the photo to the right Lilly Baker holds a metal awl - a sharp-pointed tool that can be used to sew plant material around the basket foundation.

Other tools such as scissors, sharpening stones, a knife, and spoon were used as well. The spoon (pictured right) is a tool that Lilly created to shape plant shoots. When willow rods were pulled through the holes, imperfections and bulges were shaved off quickly without having to use the pocket knife.





I never know what the design of the basket will be when I start. It just happens...It is the Maidu in me coming through my fingers.

-Lilly Baker

# Living with the Land

For the Mountain Maidu, gathering, hunting and fishing depends on the time of year and available resources.

Acorns are a primary food choice, because they are easy to store, highly nutritious, and can be used to make many different types of food. Along with acorns, tubers and corms (or plant roots), seeds, and berries were also gathered. Baskets were essential tools for harvesting, processing, storing, and cooking acorns and other foods.

Large game (such as deer, elk, and antelope) and small game (such as rabbits) were traditionally hunted. Bows and arrows, spears, and knives were used to hunt larger game animals while the smaller game was hunted with nets. Nets, weirs, and spears were used for fishing. Woven basket traps were sometimes used for fish and birds.



# Nutritious and Abundant



Acorns collected from oak trees have been a staple of California Indigenous diets for over 4,000 years. The stewardship of oak woodlands frequently involved the intentional use of prescribed fires, which allowed Native peoples to enhance oak distribution and abundance to create a more stable oak environment. This is an example of TEK being used to manage this vital resource.

Of the more than 20 varieties of acorn species in California, the most widely used by the Maidu include: tanbark oak, black oak, blue oak, and valley oak. Acorns are very nutritious. When combined with salt, meat, broth, or vegetables, acorns that have been processed can make a delicious meal.

*Image of Live Oak tree and acorns from Wikimedia.*

# Baskets Play a Vital Role:

## *Gathering and Storing*

The first step in acorn processing is the collection and storage of the various types of acorns. They are collected in the autumn and dried in the sun before storage and use.

**Burden baskets** are used to carry heavy loads on one's back, while smaller gathering baskets are hand-held.

**Seedbeaters** are used alongside burden baskets to shake plant seeds into the basket. **Storage** baskets are large baskets that hold seeds and acorns until they are to be used.

Baskets are unique for each food type that needs to be stored. Depending on the material, they are tightly or loosely woven to prevent or create circulation which protects against rot. Tightly woven baskets prevent loss of food and pest infestations as well.



Seedbeater and Burden Basket made by Daisy Baker.



Acorns are prepared for cooking by cracking the shell and removing the kernels, which are ground into flour, traditionally using a stone mortar and pestle.

*Image of acorns, mortar and pestle by John Rusk.*

## Baskets Play a Vital Role:

*Preparing and cooking acorns...*

**Winnowing trays** are used to toss seeds in the air, allowing the wind to remove outer husks and eliminate unwanted material from collection. **Sifting trays** are used to gently tap the acorn to separate the fine grained and coarse-grained flour. The larger pieces are then placed back on the stone slab to be ground further.

Acorn flour is leached to remove tannic acid. Leaching is the pouring of water gently through the acorn flour, which can take several hours. Once the flour is leached, the acorn flour can be cooked. **Cooking baskets** are used to boil acorn mush with cooking stones and stir sticks.

Today, acorn-based foods are prepared using the traditional techniques described above, as well as contemporary tools, such as hammers for cracking and blenders for grinding.



Sifting tray (made by Daisy Baker) and bowl (made by Kate Meadows-McKinney). If you look closely you might see the acorn flour between the grooves on the tray and bowl from use.



A member of the Maidu Indigenous group cooking in large cooking baskets using a hot stone and stirring sticks.

*Image courtesy of California State University, Chico Meriam Library Special Collections.*

## Museums and Native Americans: A Complex History

The settlement of North America by colonists and settlers impacted Indigenous peoples throughout centuries of land theft and loss, loss of resources, culture, languages, and religious beliefs, forced relocation and separation as well as violence and enslavement. These impacts continue to impact Indigenous peoples due to associated intergenerational trauma and solastalgia linked to the inherent relationship between Indigenous people and their homelands.

The origins of American natural history, history, and anthropology museums are directly linked to a disregard for aspects of Native American cultures and sacred cultural attributes. Amateur collectors, early archaeologists, anthropologists and curators treated the cultural possessions of American Indians as scientific specimens and objects to “save” from what was perceived as disappearing cultures.

Museums have perpetuated stereotypes of Native Americans in exhibitions by portraying them through a western lens, frozen in time, and without accurate context or any discussion of their contemporary life and traditions.

### **What is Solastalgia?**

Coined by philosopher Glenn Albrecht in 2005, solastalgia describes a form of emotional distress caused by environmental change.

## De-Colonizing the Museum

Colonization can be defined as the process or act of establishing control over a place and a people. Colonization has occurred globally, throughout time, and people who are colonized are often forced to accept the culture and lifestyles of the dominant culture.

De-colonization in the museum context involves expanding the perspectives that are used throughout the museum, from exhibitions to collections and beyond. De-colonization means moving from a perspective that is created by, and reflective of, the dominant cultural group, to a perspective that includes or prioritizes diverse perspectives that emerge from collaboration.

In 2004 the National Museum of the American Indian opened on the National Mall in Washington DC. The museum has served as a powerful example of the decolonization movement.

The NMAI has been steadfastly committed to bringing Native voices to what the museum writes and presents... The NMAI is also dedicated to acting as a resource for the hemisphere's Native communities and to serving the greater public as an honest and thoughtful conduit to Native cultures—present and past—in all their richness, depth, and diversity. *(From [NMAI website](#))*

The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) pictured below, is part of the Smithsonian Institution.



# Thanking Our Consultants

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We would like to thank Dr. Don Hankins (Miwok), Susan Campbell (Mountain Maidu), and Rachel McBride-Praetorius (Yurok), Director of Tribal Relations, CSU Chico, for their work as consultants for this exhibit. The information they shared has been invaluable to our research.

We would also like to thank Dr. Vanessa Esquivido (NorRel Muk Wintu, Hupa, and Xicana) Ph.D. Native American Studies at UC Davis. Her research focuses on California Indian Nations, Native Women, Environmental sovereignty, NAGPRA, and Northwestern California Indian Basketry.

Thanks to Heather Martin, Assistant State Archaeologist, State Archaeological Collections Research Facility, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Cultural Resources Division.

Further research and information for the development of this exhibition derives from the California Association of Museums webinar, titled, [\*Decolonizing the Narrative of Native American Museum Interpretations\*](#), presented by:

- ❖ Nicole Lim (Pomo), PhD, Executive Director of the California Indian Museum and Cultural Center
- ❖ Dr. Joely Proudfit (Luiseno), PhD, Executive Director of the California Indian Culture and Sovereignty Center, California State University San Marcos
- ❖ Dr. Alexis Buntan (Aleut/Yup'ik), PhD, Co-Director of the Bioneers Indigeneity Program
- ❖ Dr. Kouslaa Kessler-Mata (Chumash), PhD, Associate Professor and Department Chair of the Department of Political Science, University of San Francisco

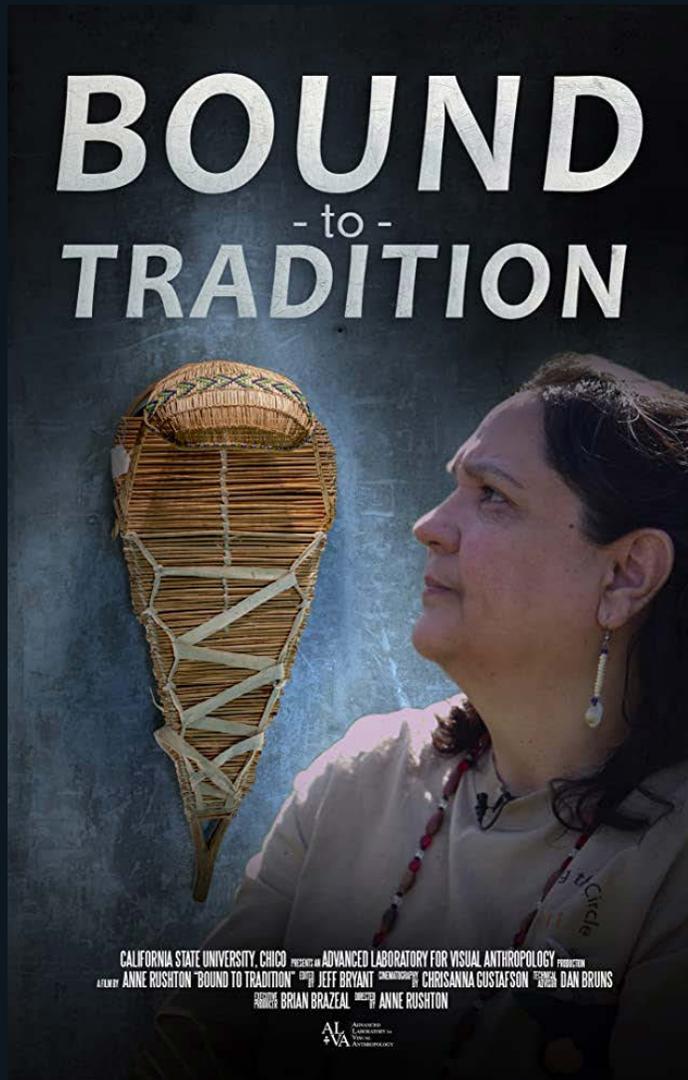
# Watch the Video

Learn about basketry traditions and traditional ecological knowledge with Susan Campbell (Mountain Maidu) who is making a cradleboard for her first grandchild. Along the way she discovers just how difficult it can be to balance her traditional ways with modern society.

2012 / 22 minutes / Directed by Anna Rushton

Bound to Tradition was produced in the [Advanced Laboratory for Visual Anthropology \(ALVA\) at CSU, Chico.](#)

ALVA was created with funding from the National Science Foundation, Major Research Instrumentation grant. It is the first facility to incorporate digital cinema technology into anthropological research and the communication of the results of that research to broad audiences.



# Learn More

[California Indian Basketweavers' Association](#)

[National Museum of the American Indian](#)

[What does it mean to decolonize a museum?](#) February 7, 2019, MuseumNext.

[What's Wrong With This Diorama? You Can Read All About It](#), March 20, 2019, The New York Times.

The baskets on display in this exhibition were generously loaned to the Valene L. Smith Museum of Anthropology by the Kurtz family for the duration of this exhibition. Images in this presentation are from the Kurtz Family Photography Collection, unless otherwise noted.



Daisy Baker working on a basket in her home in 1963.  
*Photo by Philip Hyde.*