ENDEARING TRADITIONS: BASKETS IN NATIVE CALIFORNIA
ETHNOHISTORICAL DOCUMENTS AND ABSTRACTS

1. JOEL COTTON’S NOTEBOOK
Collectors Joel (1875-1952) and Evelyn Cotton traveled extensively throughout the western states of North America and Mexico from 1901 to 1937 pursuing a special interest in the study of Native baskets. Joel’s notebook, pages of which are documented here, record the origin, cost, and dates of acquisition for their collection. The Cottons’ son, Norman, donated the majority of the basket collection along with the notebook, to the Anthropology Museum at California State University, Sacramento in 1962, followed by the donation of three more baskets in the 1970s, for a total of 41. (Courtesy of the Anthropology Museum.)

2. MCKAY NEWSPAPER ARTICLE, SACRAMENTO UNION
Mabel McKay became a widely known Pomo basket weaver whose baskets are currently displayed in the Smithsonian Institution. A Long Valley Cache Creek Pomo, McKay lived her life in northern California as a Native American doctor and later brought her knowledge of healing and basketry to the general public through guest lecturing and basket weaving classes. This article, from the Sacramento Union (January 23, 1934), includes a photo of Mabel McKay taken at the California State Indian Museum, located at that time in the basement of the Capitol Building. She is referred to as an “aged native” despite the fact she was merely 27 year old at the time. She is wearing a costume, unrelated to her own native dress, made for her by a white woman.

3. RIPLEY’S LETTER
Consumer interest in Native American baskets led to the development of basketry forms reminiscent of non-Native items such as trays and boxes. Other baskets were made with intricate decorations that generated great demand from buyers. In response to such interests, a Yosemite weaver, Lucy Telles, produced a basket that measured four feet across. This letter is a request, dated March 17, 1938, from Ripley's Believe It or Not to the Yosemite National Park superintendent for entry of the basket into the collection of “world-famous oddities.” (Yosemite Research Library, Yosemite National Park.)

4. APPLICATION TO CARLISLE INDIAN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL “OUTING PROGRAM”
The Carlisle Indian Industrial School, located in Pennsylvania, offered higher education to Native Americans from across the United States. Both academic and vocational programs were available during its operation (1879-1918), in which time approximately 12,000 students attended. The school was started by Army officer Richard Henry Pratt with the aim of assimilating Native Americans into White society. Programs to remove “Indian-ness” resulted in the loss of Native languages and traditions essential to cultural identity. One means by which the Carlisle bolstered assimilation was by placing its students in the homes of local residents over the summer months, where they would work for their keep. This kept them from returning to their tribes and families and further immersed them in White culture and society. This document is a 1913 application for families wishing to participate in the Carlisle Indian Industrial School’s Outing Program. Notice the statement of purpose that precedes the questionnaire portion of the document. (National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C.)
5. GREENVILLE REPORT
The Greenville Indian School, in Plumas County, California, was one of several boarding schools for Native Californian children. In addition to maintaining their studies, students were required to “earn their keep” by working in kitchens, laundry rooms, fields, and hauling firewood. While some children entered voluntarily, many were removed from their families by force. Schools like Greenville were created under a policy of assimilation and a theory of betterment through conversion to Western culture. Document 5 is a page from an annual report, dated 1911, which mentions the loss of basket weaving skills by Native American youth despite its popularity among the elders. (National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Regional Branch.)

6. GREENVILLE CURRICULUM
The Greenville Indian School offered instruction in a variety of classes including basket weaving. This document from December 31, 1911 records the attendance of students and their various courses of instruction. Please note that students 2, 12, and 21 are enrolled in basketry classes. (National Archives and Records Administration, Pacific Regional Branch.)

7. CSUS COURSE CATALOGUE
Basket weaving was traditionally passed down through family members; but the loss of cultural traditions during the early part of the 20th century prompted many weavers to teach basket weaving to non-Native people. A course offered at California State University, Sacramento by Marie Potts brought basketry to the public. This course offering, California Indian Basketmaking, is listed as an Interdepartmental Offering (Arts and Sciences) in the Fall 1973 class schedule. (Original in Special Collections and University Archives, California State University, Sacramento.)

8. FLORENCE HARRIE AND MARIE POTTS PHOTO
Many Native American traditions were demonstrated at events such as the California State Fair held each summer in Sacramento. This image shows Florence Harrie (left) and Marie Potts (right) weaving at the state fair in the “California Indian Exhibit” sponsored by the Federated Indians of California in the 1950s. Florence Harrie, a Karuk basket weaver, was born in 1890 and lived in Quartz Valley. She is known to have woven all forms of baskets and to have demonstrated her skills at the state fair for many years. Marie Potts was Mountain Maidu and lived from 1895 to 1978. She was politically active, voicing her opinions on numerous issues facing Native Americans. Her activity was apparent in her participation in the Federated Indians of California, a pan-California Indian organization started in the late 1940s in response to land claim issues. Potts is particularly known for her contributions as editor of the Smoke Signal, a Native Californian newspaper that she wrote and edited for nearly three decades. (Photo courtesy of Sacramento Archives and Museum Collection Center.)

9. SMOKE SIGNAL ARTICLE
Traditional basket weaving begins with the gathering of plant materials and therefore requires access to locations where these resources grow. As California’s settler population grew, land became privatized large highways and roads were built, and basket weavers increasingly lost access to basketry materials. This article from the July-August 1972 issue of the Native

10. FRANK DAY PAINTING “CREMATION”

“When one was dying, he was placed in the large basket, and checked from time to time to determine whether or not he had expired. Quantities of pine pitch were added to the basket, which, when warmed by the body, flowed about the basket. The body was swathed in animal hides, so the basket interior would be quite warm. Upon the occupant’s death, the basket was set afire and rolled down a small slope to the waiting pyre below.” The artist Frank Day, a Maidu Indian, described the imagery in this painting during a recorded interview, on file in the Anthropology Department. The painting is undated, but was probably completed soon after 1962. (*Permanent Collection, Anthropology Museum.*)

11. PHOTO OF FRANK DAY

Frank Day (Konkow Maidu) was a self-taught artist who began painting around 1962. He lived from 1902 to 1976 and was raised in the Sierra Nevada foothills near Oroville, east of the Sacramento River. He lived with his father, Billy Day until the age of 20 (although during this time, he also spent eight years at the Greenville Indian School). Later in life, Day used painting as a means to record Maidu history and cultural traditions taught to him by his father. Frank Day and his paintings have become known worldwide. (*Photo on file at the Anthropology Museum.*)

12. INDIAN ARTS AND CRAFT ACT

The demand for Native American products in the early 20th century, coupled with the unequal power relations between Natives and non-Natives, allowed many native crafts to be bought for a pittance or to be stolen altogether. The Indian Arts and Crafts Act of 1935 was established with the intent of promoting and protecting the development of Native American arts and crafts. The act created a board that supported the trade market and created marks of authenticity and quality. The Act also established a penalty of a fine and prison time for selling "authentic" Native goods not produced by Native American artisans. This portion of the document summarizes the various sections of the Act, which was passed on August 27, 1935.

13. CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS DEPARTMENTAL NOTICE: NATIVE CALIFORNIA INDIAN GATHERING POLICY

California Department of Parks and Recreation has been a front-runner in recent efforts to preserve and facilitate Native weaving traditions. This document, dated March 23, 1988, establishes a formal policy allowing Native Californians to gather natural resources on state park lands, including plant materials needed for basket weaving.

14. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES BILL (H.R. 2824) PUBLIC LAW 85-671, CALIFORNIA RANCHERIA ACT

Although the United States had long practiced a policy of assimilation, perspectives on how best to accomplish this goal shifted throughout the late 19th and early 20th century. By mid-20th century, many in Congress and in the Bureau of Indian Affairs felt that instead of fulfilling those obligations to Native Americans that had arisen through the treaty process and related
negotiations, a policy of terminating these responsibilities was preferable. Throughout the 1950s, countless bills were introduced into the House of Representatives in an effort to facilitate the “termination” of federal supervision over and responsibility toward Native Americans. Document 14 shows the original language of a bill that (following minor revisions), would become Public Law 85-671.

First introduced on January 14, 1957, and enacted into law on August 18, 1958, this bill authorized termination of the federal trust relationship with California Indian rancherias. (Section 1 of the original bill authorized termination for only Strawberry Valley and Wilton Rancherias—a revision of this section allowed for the termination of 43 rancherias. A transcription of the final version of HR 2824 is available here.) By the 1960s, the process of termination was well under way throughout California. Public Law 85-671 (HR 2824) promised, to tribes who voted in favor of termination, substantial improvements (water, sewage, roads, etc.) to the communally-owned lands that, under provision of the bill, were to be divided and distributed to individual landowners. Many groups, believing these improvements would be made and not informed of the extent to which to other services would be removed, voted in favor of termination. Seventeen of the earliest rancherias to be terminated won reinstatement in 1983, under Tillie Hardwick Ruling (so named for the Pomo woman who, in 1979, filed suit against the federal government on behalf of 34 rancherias deemed to have been illegally terminated). Many Native California tribes and bands are still struggling to regain the federal recognition they lost during this period of history.