

# YOSEMITE NATURE NOTES



JULY, 1931

Volume X

Number 7

# Yosemite Nature Notes

THE PUBLICATION OF  
THE YOSEMITE EDUCATIONAL DEPARTMENT  
AND THE YOSEMITE NATURAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION  
Published Monthly

Volume X

July 1931

Number 7

## The Last Member of Chief Tenaya's Band Passes Away

By **GEORGE C. CROWE**

(Editor's note: Due to the printing of two special issues of Yosemite Nature Notes in May and June it has been impossible until now to print this closing chapter of Yosemite Indian history.)

Maria Lebarde, the last member of Chief Tenaya's band of Yosemite Indians, is gone. Monday evening, April 20, just at sundown, the soul of this frail old woman slipped out into the spirit world, there to be reunited with her people, who had passed on long before.

For more than three months Maria had been falling and though her four daughters were constantly by her side, their efforts were of little avail. The little mother was conscious to the last and was ready to go; her sight was dim, her body weary, and food would not sustain her and so she fell asleep.

Maria was nearing the century mark. Her exact age is not known. For many years she lived with her oldest daughter, Mary, in a little

cabin near Mariposa. Two other daughters with their families live close by.

Maria never forgot the tragic experiences of her childhood, when, as a girl of 10 or 12 years, she, with about two hundred of her tribe, climbed up the trails from Ahwannee for the last time, driven from their great valley by the Mariposa battalion, ever to be a scattered people.

### BACK TO HOME OF YOUTH

Her return many years afterward is vividly told by Mrs. H. J. Taylor, then librarian of the Yosemite Museum, in "The Return of the Last Survivor":

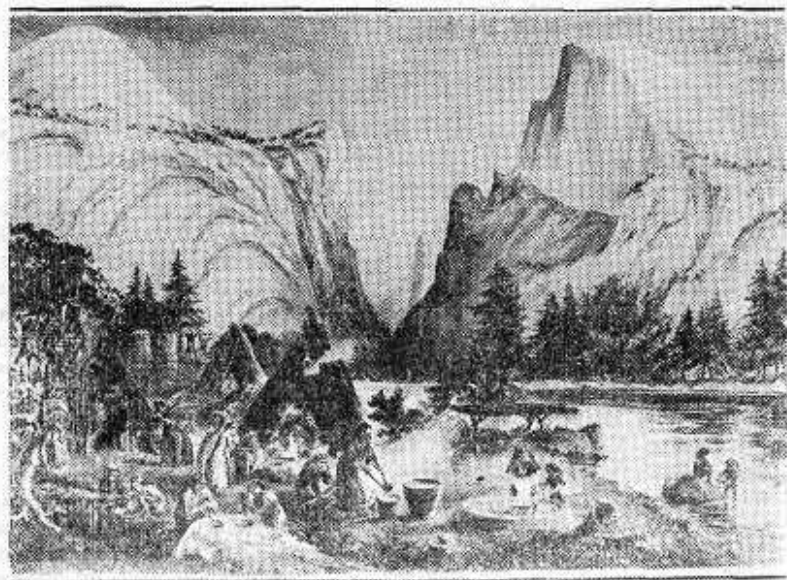
"Seventy-eight years had passed when in July, 1929, Maria, then in

her late eighties, returned for the first time to the home of her childhood, her beloved Ahwahnee. The Kellogg and golden cup oaks produced abundantly that year, and Maria had gathered several bushels of their acorns. They lay in a large pile beside her tent in Indian Village, now inhabited mostly by Piutes and Monos. The horny outer shell of the acorns which had been cracked with stones, she removed with her hands. The soft brown inner coverings was blown away when winnowed in her chincoo (basket-shake). She pounded the acorns in a metate with a stone pestle, leeching out the tannin, and cooked the flour into a palatable mush. It was here in the Indian Village of Yosemite that I met Maria, last sur-

vivor of the exiled band, talked with her daily for a week as she prepared her acorn food, and heard from her lips an unwritten story.

#### THE TRAGIC EXODUS

"Expulsion had left its impress on the child, and recollections of the event, though few, were vivid. There was a long climb through the snow, out of the Valley, over the mountains, in sorrow and humiliation. Then there was the figure of the soldier—'Man with the red shirt . . . man with the red shirt.' she always replied to my questioning. And in these images is the essence of it all—the tragedy of a people fleeing out from their tribal home, forced by the red-shirted Forty-niner!



AN OLD INDIAN VILLAGE IN YOSEMITE VALLEY

From a painting by Lady C. E. Gordon Cumming, made in 1878 and now exhibited in the Yosemite Museum.

## EARLY RECOLLECTIONS

"But of the valley itself and the life of her people her memories were numerous and varied. We went together to the cemetery. At the grave of Lucy, her cousin, she stood a moment in silence, then began to moan and wail loudly. Moaning, Maria cried, 'All gone, long, long time 'go. I 'lone; no more Yosemite; long time go.' She stopped to pick some ferns nearby and placed them on the grave.

"In the Indian room of the museum she looked about in wonderment. The 'long time ago' became the present, and youth and joy and laughter returned to her. Her Indian words needed no interpreter, for the human face speaks a universal language. In basketry, she quickly detected whether made by Mono or Yosemite. A poorly made basket she pronounced 'too dirty, pointing out where it lacked smoothness and form. She took a hiki (cradle), strapped the band across her forehead, and with delicious laughter walked about, saying, 'Papoose, long time ago.' The Indian arrowheads recalled the annual visit of the Monos into the valley to trade their obsidian for acorns. Food was essential, likewise weapons. In awakened memories Maria lived over the distant past. Extending her arms to all that was about her she murmured, 'Long, long time 'go; I so big,' as she pointed to a little girl of about 10 years.

"From the meadow she looked up at the rock walls of the valley. The great monoliths stood unchanged. The waterfalls drawing their substance from the eternal source of rain and snow, spoke to her as they had spoken in her childhood. Looking at Yosemite Falls she cried:

"'Chorlock! Chorlock no gone!' She saluted Tu-tock-ah-nu-lah, now known as El Capitan. Her own Indian village had stood in full view of Loya, now Sentinel Rock. It seemed very dear to her. A momentary silence, then in quiet supplication she said, 'Loya, Loya! Long time 'go!' For us the wonders of Yosemite took on new and deeper meaning as the names so full of Indian lore fell from her lips. What loss to posterity and to history that these names have not been preserved! Bridal Veil, Vernal Falls, Mirror Lake, Sentinel Rock, Half Dome—these names are found throughout the world. Yosemite alone has a Pohono, a Py-we-ack, an Ah-wi-yah, a Loya, a Tis-sa-ack. In these names there is tradition and meaning that express the life of the people who originally possessed this valley.

## IN THREE TONGUES

"Maria's speech is laconic. Her words are Indian, Spanish and English. It was expression rather than words that told her graphic story. Pointing to Eagle Peak, she told of gathering Indian potatoes along the slope and up the trail. I gave her the flower and bulb of the common brodiaea. Her face lit up with a smile. The flower she knew. She bit into the bulb and laughed, saying, 'Walli, walli!' (i. e., from the earth.)

## OLD VILLAGE SITE

"Yosemite Valley is seven miles long and from a half mile to a mile in width. Through its entire length flows the Merced river, on either side of which were located the Indian villages of her time. As we approached Bridal Veil Falls (Pohono, in her day), Maria called sharply to the men: 'Boys, Pohono! Look

out, boy! Pohono kill boy much!" We stopped. This, she told us, was the western limit of the Indian wigwams, beyond which no Indian dared to build his utco (house), for the evil wind swayed the falls. Bridal Veil stretches a rainbow across the valley, and beyond it an Indian feared to go, lest the evil spirit of Pohono claim him.

#### CLARITY OF MIND

"Though bent, Maria is physically strong. The gnarled hands, purple with age, speak clearly of a life of toll. Her shock of steel-gray hair is cut short. Her face is wrinkled with lines deep and innumerable, such as only time can trace through almost 90 summers of changing skies. Her mind is clear and alert; her senses are well preserved. Often as we shelled acorns together, we sat long without a spoken word; yet it was not an empty silence. The lights and shadows of the face may be read; they can never be translated into words.

"The days were full for Maria, lone survivor of the Yosemite Indians who were driven from the valley. Memory became a reality to her. Emotionally she lived over the tragic events of her life—events that have long since passed into cold, historical data; and to those who spent these days with Maria Lebrado the facts of Yosemite's early history took on the life and

atmosphere of human beings who suffered hopelessly.

"We bade her goodbye. To the young men she curtsied as she said, 'Goodbye, boys; gracias, gracias.' Laying her hand on my shoulder, she said, 'Thank, thank you, white daughter.' Then she gave the high-pitched, piercing call that Tenaya gave when he summoned his people. The clear, strong, musical tones she trilled with long-sustained breath that excited amazement. Maria stood beside her pile of acorns, gazing at Tis-sack the cleft rock. Slowly the picture faded as we followed the winding road in Ahwahnee."

#### THE LAST TRIBUTE

Maria was held in high esteem by all who knew her and a host of friends came from far and near, to attend the last rites.

At the sunset hour all followed the winding trail up the green-clad slope from the cabin to the burial ground. There on a beautiful knoll surrounded with pines and leafing oaks and carpeted with purple and golden Broriacea, Maria Lebrado's earthly form was laid away. Perhaps as she started on the last long trail again she heard the call she loved so well, the call of her old chieftain guiding her footsteps to the campfire of the Yosemitees in the great beyond.

---

The vanishing customs of the Miwok Indians, who once inhabited the Yosemite Valley, are being preserved in the Museum both by exhibits and demonstrations. Native Indians come to the Museum each day to weave baskets, prepare food from acorns, and give dances.

---



## YOSEMITE ANIMALS

### THE SKUNK AND THE BEAR

ENID MICHAEL  
Ranger-Naturalist

A half-grown skunk was seen foraging in the broad light of day during June and it so happened that this young skunk was discovered by the twin cubs that haunt the parking space at the foot of Yosemite Fall. Like all young, the cubs were curious, and were inclined to investigate the strange black and white animal. Mother bear discovered her cubs trying to scrape up an acquaintance with the skunk. Mother bear was particular. She did not like the situation, she tried to rout the skunk in a different direction, but he would not be routed and so she sent her cubs scurrying up a tree. Again she tried to bluff the skunk. She stamped her feet and snorted right in the

face of the skunk, and then she was seen to back away shaking her head as if to free her nostrils from some unpleasant odor. The skunk went calmly on with his foraging while mother bear dashed up the tree to sniff her darling cubs. One blow from mother bear's great paw would have sent the little skunk to eternity, yet for some reason she withheld that blow. On the other hand this same mother bear did not hesitate to strike a human when she felt that she was being crowded too closely by admiring throngs. Several times each morning she felt forced to scatter the crowd and usually when forced to action she slapped down some over-eager photographer.

### MOUNTAIN BEAVERS

C. C. PRESNALL  
Assistant Park Naturalist

A small colony of Mountain Beavers near the Glacier Point Hotel have attracted attention by appearing above ground in broad daylight and feeding on green herbage, thus

giving hikers on the Ledge Trail a glimpse of this little-known animal. It is nocturnal, but is otherwise very different from the Canadian Beaver, being more like a meadow mouse grown to fifteen times normal size, and living in burrows near mountain streams.

## A Nevada Falls Solitaire's Nest

B. A. THAXTER

Ranger-Naturalist

To hear a Townsend solitaire sing is an experience that delights the soul of any bird lover; to find one's nest is an occurrence rare enough and unusual enough to warrant chronicling. Such a find was the writer's recently on one of our Yosemite trails. On June 18, 1931, while returning from a trip to Nevada Falls we were fortunate enough, to find a nest beside the new trail about three-quarters of a mile down from the falls.

"Viewed from any standpoint," says Dawson, in his "The Birds of California," "taxonomic, psychologic or sentimental, the Townsend solitaire is a feathered sphinx. It has been called flycatcher, thrush, and a combination of the two; but the name solitaire seems best to express both our noncommittal attitude toward the subject, and the demure independence with which the bird itself proceeds to mind its own affairs. Barring the matter of structure, which the scientists have now pretty well threshed out, the bird is everything by turns. He is a flycatcher, in that he delights to sit quietly on exposed limbs and watch for passing insects. These he meets in midair and bags with an emphatic snap of the mandibles. He is a shrike in appearance and manner, when he takes up a station on a fencepost and studies the ground intently. When his prey is sighted, at distances varying from 10 to 30 feet, he dives directly to the spot, lights, snatches and swallows, in an instant, or if the catch is unmanageable he returns to his post to thrash and kill and swallow at lei-

sure. During this pouncing foray, the display of white in the solitaire's tail reminds one of the lark sparrow. Like the silly cedar-bird, the solitaire gorges itself on fruits and berries in season. Like a thrush, when the wood is on, the solitaire skulks in the thickets or woody depths, and flies at the suggestion of approach; before alighting it stands quietly, in expectation that the eye of the beholder will thus lose sight of its ghostly tints among the interlacing shadows."

## NEST DISCOVERED

Our finding of the nest on this June day was quite accidental. We were walking carelessly when the bird flushed from almost under our feet. She never uttered a sound, but the plain gray coloration and comparatively long tail made us suspect it was solitaire. She flew off 25 or 30 yards and then circled around and came back to a small oak tree about 10 feet from the nest. The white eye ring now plainly seen enabled us to make our identification complete. She was singularly quiet. In a moment or two she was back on the nest, which was placed on a steep cut bank about a foot from where horses and people pass by every day. It was sheltered by a projecting piece of granite and would have remained undiscovered had we not stepped too close for the bird's comfort. The nest itself consisted only of a slight depression in the gravel quite thickly lined with pine needles. There were three eggs, rather round, pinkish white in color and spotted sparingly with

heavy brown spots. When the nest was visited on June 21 there were still only three eggs in the nest. This evidently was an average nest as the solitaire lays three, four or rarely five eggs in a clutch.

#### KEEP IN HIDING

Grinnell, in his "Animal Life in the Yosemite," says "Solitaires at nesting time are notably unobtrusive birds. They haunt shady places. Their color tone is neutral. They can keep perfectly still minutes at a time, and when they do move their motions are of a sort which do not catch the observer's eye quickly. Thus a female solitaire, whose nesting site is in plain view at the side of a well-traveled road, may come and go throughout the whole nesting period without ever giving any clear indication that her interests in the locality are more than casual. Her attitude to outward appearances is wholly the opposite of that of a robin or a junco."

We did not see the male bird nor did we have the pleasure of hearing him sing from some lofty perch nearby. But some of the party the following day on the Eagle Peak trail above the top of the Yosemite Falls both saw a male and heard him sing.

#### I HAD A SURPRISE TODAY

Charles Michael, Asst. Postmaster

I had a surprise in Yosemite today. One of those surprises that come as an adventure to one who dally hobnobs with the birds. My dally walk was finished I was back at the postoffice feeding station with 15 minutes to spare before go-

ing to the office. I sat down in the shade of the great pine to rest a little and to watch for the slate-colored junco. While I sat there a strange bird flew into the coffee-berry bush that stands near the cedar tree. I was looking into the sun and all I could make out was the silhouette of the bird—no color. It was a bird about the length of a robin, but of more slender build. A bird with a long floppy tail—a tail that appeared to be fastened with a very loose hinge. A tail that would wag from side to side or flit up and down. A tail that was held at a cocky angle like the tail of a wren-tit. In silhouette the bird looked like a brown thrasher, but the long sickle-shaped bill was lacking. I moved cautiously around the bird to get the sun in my favor, and then I saw that the general coloration was much like that of the Townsend solitaire. As I moved closer the bird flew to the ground and I saw a flash of white bordering as the tail spread, and there were round white wing patches.

As the stranger to Yosemite valley hopped along the ground his tail was held erect and this tail, I should say, was the bird's most expressive feature. And it is this expressive tail that at once differentiates this bird from the shrike and the solitaire, birds of somewhat similar size and markings. This bird wore no garish colors, but he had a manner about him and he carried his slim body with an aristocratic air. An erratic wanderer was he from the sunny land of citrus trees.

In my 11 years residence in Yosemite valley this is but the second time that the western mockingbird has come to my notice.







## MUSEUM NOTES

### SUBSTANTIAL GIFT MADE TO YOSEMITE MUSEUM

The Yosemite Museum gratefully acknowledges a recent bequest given by Miss Marjorie Montgomery Ward, of Chicago. Miss Ward wishes that the money be used for developing the area around the Museum, using native flowers and trees to create a living exhibit of the fauna and flora of Yosemite.

Plans are now being made for the planting of shade trees and lawn to form an attractive setting for wild flower gardens and a miniature Indian village. The entire area will be surrounded by heavy plantings of native shrubs which will attract many birds and small mammals that are now absent around the Museum. An attractive fountain and stream will form the nucleus of the entire project.



THE YOSEMITE MUSEUM



Digitized by  
Yosemite Online Library

<http://www.yosemite.ca.us/library>

Dan Anderson