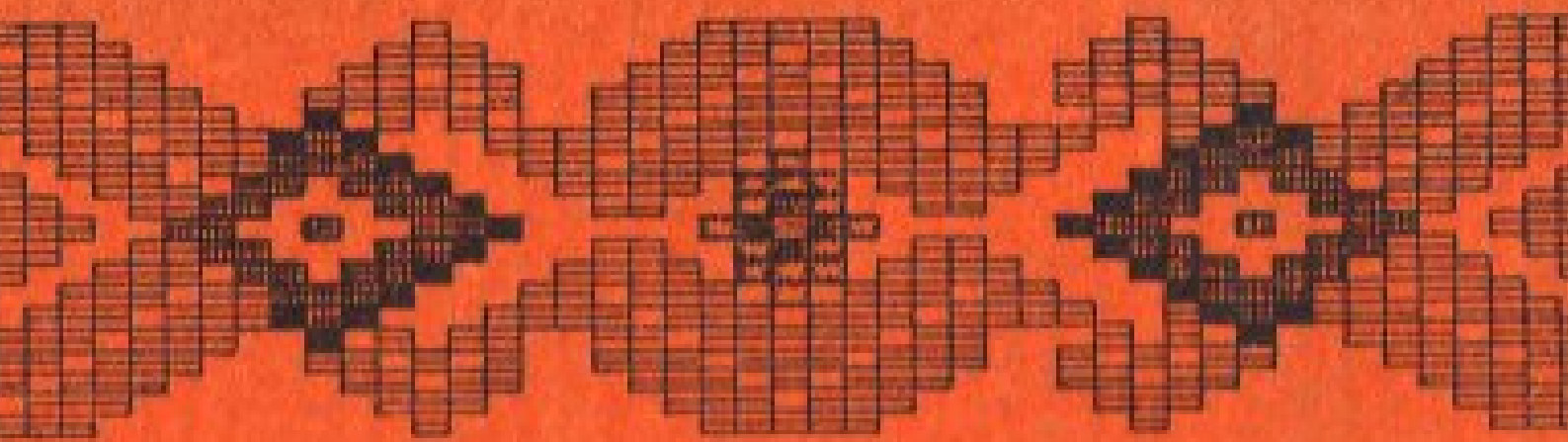


THE LAST SURVIVOR



M R S . H . J . T A Y L



MARIA LEBRADO—THE LAST SURVIVOR

[Editor's note: In the *Chronicle* article Joseph Dixon is credited for this photograph.—DEA.]

THE LAST SURVIVOR

BY

MRS. H. J. TAYLOR



San Francisco:
JOHNCK & SEEGER
1932

Reprinted by permission of the Regents of the University of California,
from the University of California Chronicle, January, 1931, Vol. XXXIII, No. I
and January, 1932, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1

Copyrighted, 1931 and 1932

PREFACE



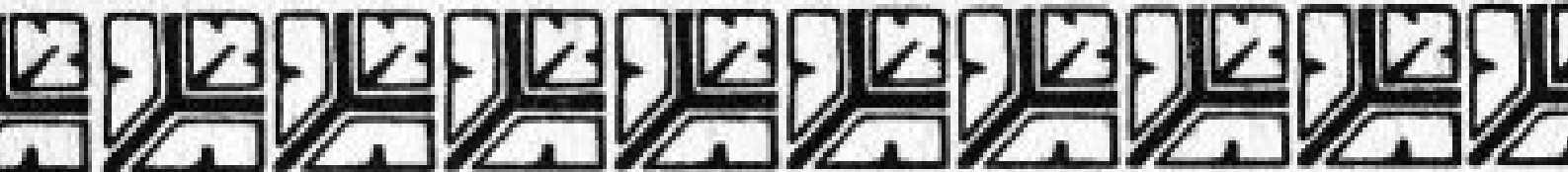
he story of *To-tu-ya (Foaming Water)* is one of interrupted childhood, unfilled longing, and silent suffering. She was born in Yosemite in the early eighteen forties. Ahwahnee was her playground; tumultuous Chorlock she loved; graceful, enchanting Pohono she feared. The monoliths—*Tu-tock-ah-nu-la, Tis-sa-ack, To-ko-ya, Loya*—given life in story by the Yosemite Indians, stood as protecting sentinels over her and her tribe. But scarcely a dozen years had passed when family and tribe were scattered by war and defeat at the hands of oncoming American miners.

While yet in her teens, she married a full-blooded Yosemite, a fellow refugee. Only the eldest of the five children she bore him survives. The untimely death of her husband brought added hardships. She married a Mexican miner, Lebrado Yerdies, whom she bore four daughters.

Life was nearing its close when *To-tu-ya* returned from exile to live a few days in her home of earliest memories. Souvenir-loving tourists came to look at her as she sat shelling a pile of acorns; one of them offered a nickle for an acorn from her hands. With deep feeling and resentment she pushed the coin aside and cried, "No! Not five dollars one acorn, no! White man drive my people out—my Yosemite."

In her heart *To-tu-ya* treasured her Indian name, though the world called her *Maria Lebrado*. *To-tu-ya* —*Foaming Water*—will be heard as long as the melting snows pour in torrents over the granite walls of her childhood Yosemite.

THE RETURN OF THE LAST SURVIVOR



THE RETURN OF THE

LAST SURVIVOR



Eight miles east of Mariposa, in the Mother Lode country of California, a trail leads over the hill from Dawson's Service Station to a little old log cabin. It is the home of Maria Lebrado,* [* Her Indian name was To-tu-ya (Foaming Water). The accompanying pictures were taken in Yosemite in July, 1929, at the time of her only visit to her birthplace.] granddaughter of Tenaya, chief of the Yosemite Indians. The gold rush brought conflict between miners and Indians, and in 1851 the Yosemitees were driven by the Mariposa Battalion from their secluded valley home, their *Ahwahnee*.† [†The Yosemite Indians called the Valley "Awani." Interestingly, the name Yosemite was first applied to the Valley itself by Dr. Bunnell[1], a member of the battalion then in the very act of expelling the very people for whom he named it.] At the point of the bayonet, about two hundred Indians, almost without clothing or food for the winter, made their way out by Inspiration Point and the Wawona road, or climbed the steep trail of Indian Canyon; among the latter was Maria, a girl of about ten years. Henceforth the Yosemite Indians were a scattered people, never again to know the tie of band or tribe.

Seventy-eight years had passed when in July, 1929, Maria, then in her middle 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 covering was blown away when winnowed in her *chincoo* (basket-shake). She pounded the acorns in a mortar with a stone pestle, leached 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 survivor 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.

Expulsion had left its impress on the child, and recollections of the event, though few, were vivid. There was the 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 filing out from their tribal home, forced by the red-shirted Forty-niner!

But of the Valley itself and the life of her people her memories were more 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. Aside, her daughter explained, "Indian do like that 'cause they Indian. We not tell Mamma now when relation die, 'cause she not strong to cry three days and no sit, no eat." Moaning, Maria cried, "All gone, long, long time 'go. I 'lone; no more Yosemite; long time 'go." She stooped to pick some ferns near by and placed them on the grave. With hands extended, she chanted in strong, clear tones words that I did not understand, then turned to me and said in sympathetic voice, "I Catholic just little Catholic." And she was comforted.

In the Indian room of the museum she looked about in wonderment. The "long time 'go" 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 'go." 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 ten years.

Two young men drove us over the Valley she had not seen since her childhood. The wide open meadow, the Indian *pantanko** [*Probably from the Spanish *fandango*, meaning "dance", but applied by Maria to the meadow where Indian festivals were held.] of her day was covered with trees and shrubs. She shook her head, saying, "Too dirty; too much bushy." Everywhere, to her, the floor of the Valley seemed changed. She clasped her hands and exclaimed, "All fixed up! Ahwahnee too dirty bushy. No big pantanko; long time 'go big, like all kick 'em." We failed to understand. Loud and emphatically she repeated, "Long 'go, pantanko big place like all kick 'em." Still we did not grasp the meaning. She leaned forward, placed an imaginary ball and kicked it. "Football field!" we exclaimed. Her laughter was delightful and unbounded. Later we came upon Leidig's Meadow, now the largest open space in the Valley. Her face beamed with joy as she cried, "Pantanko! Ahwahnee!" The voice, the lights and shadows of the human face give expression beyond the power of words.

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.

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).

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 *utcu* (house), for the evil wind swayed the falls. Indian names reveal the superstitions and imaginings of the Indian mind. When several Indians lost their lives in the stream that forms Pohono, it became bewitched. Anyone pointing his finger at Pohono, said Maria, would at once be killed by its poisonous spray. Bridal Veil stretches a rainbow across the Valley, and beyond it an Indian feared to go lest the evil spirit of Pohono claim him.

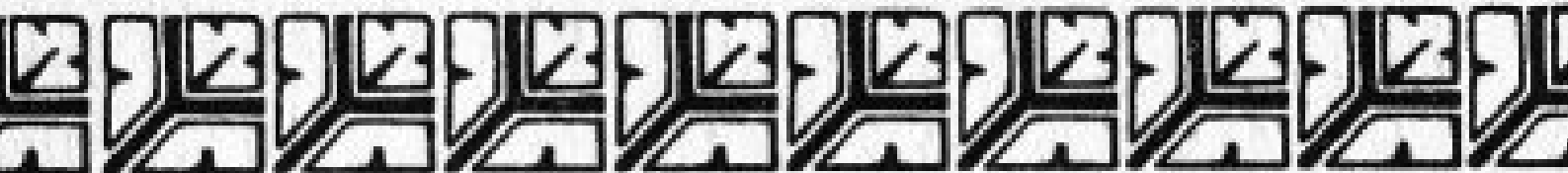
Though bent, Maria is physically strong. The gnarled hands, purple with age, speak clearly of a life of toil. Her shock of steel-gray hair is cut short. Her face is wrinkled with lines deep and innumerable, such as only time can trace through almost ninety summers of changing skies. Her mind is clear 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.

I asked about the four sons. She looked afar off. The unshelled acorn fell from her fingers as she stretched forth her hand. Her body swayed. Her breath was a deep-drawn sigh. Slowly she whispered the names, "Leandro, Cruz, Pietro, Angelo." In the sacred silence I felt the agony and sorrow of the mother heart, the longing that time could not still. Almost breathlessly she repeated the names, and I, too, seemed to see them pass before me. In whispered tones I heard, "Gone, all gone, long 'go." Looking at me as if she had suddenly become aware of my presence, her face took on the look of revenge. In harsh and powerful tones she cried aloud, "Gone! all gone, long 'go!" Each of the four sons had met a tragic death. We continued shelling acorns in silence. I asked about her daughters. She raised four fingers. "Mary, full-blood!" she said with pride. Maria's first husband was a Yosemite. Her second husband was Mexican. With three fingers upraised she said, "Andrea, Francisca, Grace,"* [*Candelaria, a fourth daughter by the Mexican husband, died in early womanhood.] there was merriment in her eyes as she whispered in my ear, "Half-breed." Then followed roguish laughter.

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 good-bye. To the young men she curtsied as she said, "Good-bye, 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-sa-ack, the cleft rock. Slowly the picture faded as we followed the winding road in Ahwahnee.

THE DEATH OF THE LAST SURVIVOR



THE DEATH OF THE LAST SURVIVOR



As flowers become few with the approach of winter we see them as individuals. There is a love and tenderness for the last rose that no other can awaken; this one has gathered unto itself the beauty and fragrance and sadness of all its family. The lone tree, representative of a by-gone forest, stays the woodman's ax by the strength and power of its aloneness. The Indian band driven out of Yosemite Valley by the Mariposa Battalion in 1851 became intensely personified in Maria Lebrado, granddaughter of Tenaya, Chief of the Yosemite.

As its last survivor she symbolized the history of her people. In her own lifetime she had experienced the tragic disintegration of the Yosemite tribe. Her death on April 20, 1931, broke our last link with Indian Yosemite.

Born in Yosemite Valley about 1840, she knew the trails that led up the steep slopes to the hunting grounds of the Monos, with whom acorns were exchanged for obsidian to make arrow-heads. She knew also the days of terror when the melodious call of Chief Tenaya assembling his people to feast or fandango was changed to the alarm call of threatening dangers. She knew the sorrow and humiliation of being driven out of her home, ever after to be homeless and tribeless. She experienced the life of an exile. In the effort to maintain her tribe she bore a daughter and four sons by her Yosemite husband. The husband and the four sons died. She married a Mexican miner and bore three daughters. She yet felt the pride of tribal blood; these, her later children, were "not Yosemitees," she said, adding humorously, half-breeds."

After 78 years of hardship and suffering, sorrow and anguish, Maria, a woman of nearly 90 years, visited the Yosemite Valley in July, 1929. That she was a distinguished guest moved her not. Dignified in bearing she revealed strength and courage rather than years. Standing with arms folded she looked a statue and her silence was ominous. Her well-kept shock of steel gray hair that once hung in thick black braids to her knees had for many years been cut. This was an outward expression of sorrow for the four sons who met tragic deaths. One looked at her time-worn face and words were lost in reflection. Deep experiences had left their traces, yet she had not lost the memory of joyous years. She still retained delicious laughter and a quick sense of humor. Deep in her breast was a heart of love that gave itself in true friendship.

In response to a message, I visited her in the summer of 1930 and again in the early autumn. Her look, her touch, her voice, were full of unuttered expression. She took from my arms a little child and held it to her breast saying, "Baby, baby," then in a low, sad voice she whispered, "All gone, long, long 'go, my all gone." I wanted to hear once more Tenaya's call as he summoned his people. Extending her hands and lifting her head she gave in clear, musical notes a call that vibrated in the surrounding hills. The marvel was her sustained breath. A moment of silence and she repeated the beautiful call. Never again shall I hear that music. The memory of it lures me to the freedom and naturalness and charm of Indian life that understands the streams and rocks and skies.

Early spring in 1931 brought word of Maria's illness. It was late afternoon when we arrived at her cabin on Bear Creek. The sun no longer shone and clouds were lowering. Surprised and overjoyed at our coming she stroked my arm with her feeble, bony hand, saying, "White daughter come far, far see me." She motioned to the blanket wrapped about her. I had given it. Then she laid her hand over her heart, then over mine. I sat in silence by the bedside of my friend.

I spent the night with my Indian friends. The Indian welcome, "This house is yours," invites refreshing rest.

The clouds dropped their rain; the sun shone on a new day. Maria seemed stronger. Taking leave she clasped my hand in both of hers. "Gracias, gracias, you come far, far. Thank, thank. I sick. I go." She pointed upward, then moved her hand over her body and said, "Graveyard."

Five weeks later, on April 21, I received a telegram announcing her death. A few hours later another telegram informed me that the funeral would be at ten o'clock Wednesday morning. We left at once by auto, spending the night en route. With an early start and good roads we soon reached Myers, eight miles east of Mariposa. There we left the highway and for a mile or more followed a "throughcut," rough and winding, that leads up Cocoyade Gulch and Bear Creek to Maria's cabin, and arrived shortly after eight o'clock Wednesday morning. From within came rhythmic wailing moans of relatives paying tribute to one they loved.

We entered. The body of Maria lay on a white covered board. The daughters alone had closed her eyes, folded her hands, and clothed her body for burial. My childhood conception of a princess lay before me. She wore a black silk dress. Over the knees and reaching to the feet lay a beautiful piece of bright pink satin. A similar piece, green in color, covered the body. The sleeves were ornamented at the wrists with beaded bands. A beaded belt, the gift of her daughter, lay diagonally across her breast. A beaded headband, such as Indian hands alone can make, lay across her forehead. The canvas-covered casket stood beside the body. Ten o'clock proved too early for the funeral. "Two o'clock," some thought, "would be better." Others said, "Perhaps three o'clock." Another said that "At four o'clock surely all who were coming would be there." And so it was held at four o'clock.

Maria had requested an Indian funeral such as so often she had given to others. "White people do White funeral, Indian like Indian funeral," she had told her daughters. So the funeral dance of Tenaya's day—a custom unused for many years—was decided upon.

The granddaughter of Chief Tenaya was no ordinary Indian. His blood flowed in her veins. At his funeral, in 1853, with unceasing wail and dance, she paid him tribute for three days and all these days she touched no food. His sons had been killed, and with their death she had become the embodiment of her people. Maria was a medicine woman. She had diagnosed and cured many ills. Her funeral must not be wanting in tribute due her rank.

The tom-toms played. For more than an hour relatives and friends joined in the song and dance as they circled about Maria. As four o'clock neared, the body was placed in the casket. The green veil lying at the head was spread over Maria's face. With heartfelt cries the daughters placed one last kiss and said their last good-bye. The casket was closed. Four young Indians, grandsons and relatives, with four other young Indians beside them, took up the casket and led the procession of one hundred and twenty-five up the winding trail for half a mile or more. The cemetery is on a hill-top which commands a view of mountain meadows, deep canyons and distant ranges.

The grave was lined with white muslin and covered with fronds of woodwardia. Here and there a flower added a touch of color. The casket was placed. Five or six Indian youths stood beside the grave and sang, swaying as they measured time. At the foot of the grave stood half a dozen women interpreting the singing with outstretched or uplifted arms. As the casket was lowered, "earth to earth" was said. The last distressing cries of the younger daughters were heard. Mary—Yosemite and Maria's firstborn—stood apart with head erect, shoulders back, and arms folded. Every muscle of her face was fixed. Her eyes were partly closed. The universal event of death had no terror for her. There was courage and understanding and triumph in that statue. She stood as the interpretation of Browning's *Prospice*.

In the grave were placed things dear to Maria. First a woolen blanket. An Indian youth went into the grave and spread it smoothly over the casket. All through her illness it had been wrapped about her. It touched me deeply, for it was the one I had given her. A blanket of Indian design she had used and treasured for many years was also placed on the casket. The grave was filled. The flowers were placed

upon the mound. The wreath we had made of blue and golden brodiaea we laid at the head of the grave of this native daughter. The slanting rays of the sun shone warm and bright on the last survivor's grave.

We possess her Yosemite. She sleeps in a lonely and unknown spot. Time may place a tablet on this grave. Pilgrims may wear an everlasting trail to the hilltop—a belated tribute for the suffering and exile inflicted upon her.



THE LAST SURVIVOR



COURTESY C. F. ADAM

BASKETS AND BEADED PIECES OF YOSEMITE DESIGN

Made by Yosemite Indians and presented to the author. The largest basket was made by Maria Lebrado (To-tu-ya) herself. The design of the belt on the right is that of the belt of Tenaya, grandfather of To-tu-ya, and chief of the Yosemite Indians at the time of their expulsion from the Valley.

SAN FRANCISCO: JOHNCK & SEEGER, PRINTERS

About the Author

See her biographical sketch for *Yosemite Indians and Other Sketches*.

- “Mrs. H. J. Taylor 1863-1951,” *Yosemite Nature Notes* 30(2):12-14 (February 1951) by Carl P. Russell

Bibliographical Information

Taylor, Mrs. Henry James (Rose (Schuster) Taylor) (1863-1951), *The Last Survivor* (San Francisco: Johnck & Seeger, 1932), 20 pp., 22 cm., orange paper boards with black cloth backstrip [image of cover]. Biographical sketch of Maria Lebrado Yerdies (ca. 1840-1931). “The story of To-tu-ya (Foaming Water) known as Maria Lebrado, the granddaughter of Tenaya, chief of the Yosemite Indians.” Auction catalog: Rocq. 5284.

The *The Last Survivor* was originally printed as two articles: “The Return of the Last Survivor” and “The Death of the Last Survivor,” *The University of California Chronicle*, 33(1):85-89 (Jan. 1931) and 34(1):50-55 (Jan. 1932). The 1932 book version added a preface, a photograph, and a few more sentences. Reprinted in the Fall 1994 issue of *West-Northwest: Journal of Environmental Law and Policy* (Hastings College, University of California). An earlier version of “Return of the Last Survivor” appeared in *Yosemite Nature Notes*. (1928, pp. 41-46; 1929, pp. 69-70, 85-86)

For more information about Maria Lebrado (or Labrado), see “Maria Labrado,” *The Ahwahneechees* (1966) by John Bingaman.

Digitized by Dan Anderson, December 2004, from a copy of *The Last Survivor* at the San Diego Public Library. Maria Lebrado photos were copied the *Chronicle* articles, at San Diego State University Library. These files may be used for any non-commercial purpose, provided this notice is left intact.

—Dan Anderson, www.yosemite.ca.us



Digitized by
Yosemite Online Library

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

Dan Anderson