



## Introduction

Try, for a moment, to visualize a California Indian activist. What comes to mind? Used in combination, the words *California* and *Indian activist* tend to conjure a very specific moment and image. If your mind's eye went immediately to Alcatraz and young men, you are not alone. As the women who were party to that occupation will attest, stereotypes tend to crowd out their own presence and contribution.<sup>1</sup> For California Native Americans, the problem of Alcatraz was much larger. This important milestone in American Indian activism was televised and riveting. The occupation (1969–71) captured the popular imagination and has never let it go. One unintended outcome was that national press coverage effectively conflated California, as a place, with images of American Indians whose homelands were largely out of state. Missed in this moment of rapt media attention was the island's status as the ancestral territory of the Ohlone people, indigenous to the San Francisco Bay Area, and—by extension—the very concept of California as “Indian Country” thousands of years before Native Americans from across the United States began arriving by way of military assignment, war industry employment, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) relocation programs, university enrollment, and the like.<sup>2</sup> Alcatraz coverage was frustrating to many California Indian leaders because they were still waiting for the federal government to compensate them for theft of their ancestral homelands when California became the thirty-first state to join the Union. California Indian efforts to hold the federal government accountable for stealing their land consumed most of the twentieth century. These efforts also produced one of the state's most impressive activists. She lived through Alcatraz, lending material and moral support to its occupiers, and covering it with passion in the California Indian newspaper she began editing and publishing out of her home in the late 1940s. In physical appearance, she was the antithesis of the strapping young men

the media tended to train their cameras upon at Alcatraz. This book tells her story.

Marie Mason Potts (1895–1978) was Mountain Maidu. Born in the northern reaches of the Sierra Nevada, she maintained a highly public and urban profile in the last three decades of her life as a political activist and editor of the *Smoke Signal* newspaper, headquartered in Sacramento, California. These years and accomplishments stand in stark relief to the prosaic life that federal Indian policy mapped out for Native women of her era. A graduate of two American Indian off-reservation boarding schools, Potts arrived at the first through no choice of her own. The same cannot be said of the second; she was a proud graduate of Carlisle Indian Industrial School, class of 1915. For more than sixty-three years, Potts wrote. She penned boarding school essays, *Smoke Signal* editorials, lectures about California Indian history and culture, and reams of correspondence related to state and national activism. These sources document her intercultural fluency, encounters with colonial power, and transformations in her response to it over the course of eight decades.

### Life-Writing

Archival research is traditionally associated with historians and biographers, but the field of ethnography, or cultural description and analysis, also has a tradition of life-writing. In its early days, when anthropology was associated almost exclusively with oral societies, this genre entailed interviews, transcription, and translation—the latter involving both the linguistic and interpretive variety. These works and similar ones produced in allied disciplines have been roundly criticized within and outside the discipline and academy for publishing spiritual and esoteric knowledge, reproducing romantic and essentializing tropes, and simultaneously exploiting and eliding the colonial context that enabled and encouraged their production and consumption.<sup>3</sup> Colonialism holds the opposite position in the narrative that follows; it was the ever-present force within and against which Potts lived her life. Luckily, her inner strength and sense of self were equal to it. In this respect she was, and continues to be, a role model for many Native California people.

Subjects of early ethnographic life-writing were rarely literate, widely traveled for their time, or cosmopolitan in sensibility and experience. But Potts was all these things. The archival traces of her life are widely dispersed, seemingly everywhere, most assuredly yet to be identified and studied in full. The process of tracking

them—or rather *her*—down, of plotting and following her cross-country treks, back and forth multiple times over, and situating her within her own time and place by populating these varied landscapes with the relevant cultural markers and political actors, is ethnographic fieldwork of an entirely different sort. Those who knew Potts in the Sacramento region, and there are many, both Native and non-Native, are often surprised to learn about her boarding school days and accomplishments, or the extent of her engagement with national organizations. Her grandchildren were well aware that she was always off to one or another meeting, but they did not always recognize the historical significance of her work. In the narrative that follows, Potts's voice is privileged wherever possible. It is one that emerges in abundant epistolary form and that she was careful to document and preserve in carbon copy, in oral interviews, and in a newspaper of her own.<sup>4</sup> Other voices, both contemporary and archival, contribute valuable context and perspective, but readers will discover that she had no trouble speaking for herself. In this regard, she is perhaps the only Native California woman born in the nineteenth century whose life and subjectivity are so thoroughly documented by her own hand. Assembling these sources into narrative form sheds light on both her life and the role of literacy in her generation of Mountain Maidu and California Indian people.

Ethnographic life-writing is a qualitative methodology and literary genre that highlights the variegated nature of human experience. History and culture are neither produced nor encountered as monolithic forms. Life-writing can answer questions about how individuals apprehend the material conditions and sociopolitical forces that define their life circumstances.<sup>5</sup> Potts was born into a Mountain Maidu world stripped of relative equilibrium by the gold rush and statehood. Her story brings that period of sweeping cultural change into sharper relief. It fleshes out empty corners and abstract contours of the region's intercultural history with concrete examples of how alien values and forms of power inscribed themselves upon the bodies and minds of Mountain Maidu people. Potts's story also illuminates the transformative power of human agency—the capacity to upend, circumvent, or exploit otherwise dangerous circumstances or negative effects, leveraging them for alternative ends. Life histories oriented to these potentialities can temper or challenge orthodox scholarly interpretations and recalibrate “common knowledge,” dialing its accuracy up or down a notch. Even when a biographical subject's life course is more or less conventional, their story adds new texture to the larger portrait of how people lived out the conditions of

their time. Potts's story does both of these things. It follows a predictable course in some respects. In others, it diverges radically from those well-worn and familiar paths; she exercised substantial personal agency within the stringent confines of settler colonialism.

### Settler Colonialism

Potts's lifelong expression of nostalgia for her Carlisle years is one of many ways her life story complicates easy understandings of Native American encounters with colonial institutions. Just as life histories demonstrate that not all members of a given society respond uniformly to the same phenomenon, the field of comparative colonial studies reveals that not all colonial forms and trajectories are equivalent.<sup>6</sup> Distinguishing between one or another variant is not a purely theoretical exercise; it engages contemporary peoples, politics, and futures. This is particularly the case with settler colonialism, the form applicable to the United States and other countries founded by colonists whose primary motivation in leaving their countries of origin was to permanently resettle.<sup>7</sup> This scenario contrasts with a range of alternative varieties where resource production and/or extraction, human labor foremost among them, was paramount and where decolonization, at both the sociopolitical and intellectual level, is more straightforward.

Settler colonialism, in a very small nutshell, means the colonists never go home. At some point in the colony's existence—usually many generations deep—they pursue political autonomy from the mother country. Once it's in hand, they begin transforming the territory into a new “motherland,” their own and that of their descendants. This means that while the colonial population achieves independence, the colonized do not. Their subjugation continues; what shifts is the seat of colonial power. To fully realize the colony's transformation into their homeland, settlers must wrest ownership and control of the territory—of land as the commodity resource and means of production—from the Indigenous population. Removal in the most literal sense, as in relocation to reservations or reserves—a tradition in Canada and the United States—is a common strategy. Other genocidal practices, ranging from mass murder to ethnocide, operate in tandem. Because its endgame is to rid the land of the Indigenous population, settler colonialism is constantly innovating new “population transfer” strategies, as the colonized come to recognize the latest—increasingly nuanced—measures by which they are targeted for “elimination.”<sup>8</sup>

This process of swapping out the Native for the settler is always unfinished business, as tricky as it is bloody. The settler state's perspective on the colonized population is inherently contradictory. With one hand, it claims them as cultural patrimony—a romantic source of distinction from the originating mother country; with the other, it seeks to fully erase them. This desire to simultaneously inhabit and eliminate the Native body is the essence of colonial ambivalence. Settlers wrestle with the contradictions between their own historical struggle for freedom from colonial status and their oppression of others, *their* other. Colonial ambivalence expresses the irreconcilable conditions of settler colonialism, where the Native is simultaneously admired and reviled, humanized and dehumanized, denied autonomy and sovereignty, and forever the object of self-serving—some might argue genocidal—paternalism. Many of the institutions and actors that animate Potts's life story are the very embodiment of colonial ambivalence. This creates latitude and space for her to develop her own talents and ambitions.

Potts constantly breaches the fragile cultural and racial divide that settler society erects to discern her likeness to—and distinction from—them. She is fundamentally confusing. Indian and modern at the same time, she refuses to inhabit the settler identity and body that her literacy and schooling are meant to affect. She remains Native, wielding to her own advantage tools designed to reshape her sensibilities and identities, to eliminate her Native belonging. She crosses over into settler territory, lingers, takes from it what she wants, and crosses back. She does this with confidence and aplomb, and more rarely with anger and disgust. Potts was not the first to use settler colonial tools and practices to Native advantage, but she offers a brilliant example of how this was done by a California Native in the twentieth century.

The terms *settler* and *settler colonialism* are used throughout the text. While the form is centuries old, the terminology reflects recent social-scientific nomenclature. Potts did not live her life thinking, “I am going to subvert the settler colonial state,” but she did so at regular intervals. Only rarely is there a hint of her wishing anyone real harm; her sense of human decency was bigger than that of the settlers who greedily gobbled up her homelands. The relationships she formed with most settlers were genuine and reciprocal; but they were also utilitarian and entirely necessary. They advanced her access to the material resources, legal knowledge, and symbolic capital that were critical to her desires and needs as a young woman, a mother, and an activist. As a heuristic device,

settler colonialism situates these relationships and her firsthand encounters with colonial institutions designed to eliminate Native people—to “solve the Indian problem”—in a continuing historical process and power structure. And it situates settlers, and their descendants, squarely in that structure.<sup>9</sup> This book is intended to reach a wide audience, including Native and non-Native scholars, as well as a general readership. Those who approach the book from the latter position will not find themselves burdened at every possible turn with settler colonialism’s full analytic and interpretive weight. Its quotidian influence in Potts’s life will be easily recognized by students and scholars.<sup>10</sup> The cascading effects of land dispossession defined her life from beginning to end.

### **Organization of the Book**

The natural division between Potts’s early years and those of her activist career skews biographical depth toward the final three decades of her life. Four sections, the prologue through chapter 3, cover the period preceding her move to Sacramento. Chapters 4 through 10 address her activist years. The final chapters, 8, 9, and 10, take a more thematic approach. The prologue grounds Potts’s life story in her northern California homelands, where her ancestors challenge their land dispossession by a homesteader. The traditional Mountain Maidu world of her grandfather’s youth is counterposed with a landscape radically altered by the post-gold rush economy and value system. Marie is born into a cohort of cousins who are the offspring of Maidu women and newcomers from around the world. Chapter 1 follows her to a nearby boarding school, where she joins her older cousins. The school’s mission origins and transformation into a federal boarding school are described in relation to Maidu people’s response to it. Chapter 2 is set in Pennsylvania, at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, where Marie stretches her social and intellectual wings to their full potential. Her gains are contrasted with her cousins’ less fortunate fates. Life after Carlisle is described in chapter 3. Marie marries and starts a family, reunites with her mother and Maidu heritage, and suffers discrimination and domestic abuse. Throughout these challenging times, she is determined to ensure her children’s educations and well-being, sending them off to boarding school as her personal situation declines. She survives, eventually relocating to Sacramento.

The challenges Potts faces in middle age foreshadow and fuel the activist spirit that emerges in chapter 4. California Indian land claims history and legislation  
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are summarized, giving readers a sense of the turbulent political context that gave birth to the Federated Indians of California (FIC), the organization that launched her activist career. Marie's role as editor and publisher of *Smoke Signal* is analyzed in chapter 5. This work is clearly the realization of long-simmering ambitions and literary passions originating in her boarding school education and Carlisle's print and reading culture. Her creativity and astute political sensibilities shine in chapter 6. In California's centennial years, along with other FIC officers, she plays the generic, "real Indian" in patriotic venues and settler "pioneer" celebrations. This is a bit of a devil's bargain, but it generates fundraising opportunities and state support of FIC's land grievance against the federal government. However, behind the scenes Potts is just beginning to envision and organize a very different kind of gathering, one that brings California Indians together to celebrate their distinct cultural heritage. Chapter 7 documents Potts's remarkable work curating the inaugural All-California Indian Exhibit at the 1950 state fair. This exhibit, reprised for many years to come, brings her onto the radar of local and regional amateur and professional anthropologists. Chapter 8 explores her modernity and cross-cultural interests in relation to her Mountain Maidu heritage and the history of salvage ethnography. Potts's adventurous spirit and national activism are highlighted in chapter 9. She is constantly on the go, to the benefit of the FIC, National Congress of American Indians, American Indian Chicago Conference, and American Indian Press Association. Settling back into Sacramento, chapter 10 takes a more place-based approach, demonstrating Potts's dedication to being Native in the city: to carving out community, revitalizing dance, educating schoolchildren, and recognizing the cityscape's Indigenous antiquity. The conclusion brings the land claims case and her life to a close.

### Terminology

A brief note about terminologies and names. Throughout the book some terms are used interchangeably. For instance, California Indians, California Native Americans, and Native Californians are all names for the collective group whose lands were confiscated upon statehood and who pressed suit against the federal government as "Indians of California." I use *American Indian*, *Native American*, *Native*, and *Indigenous* synonymously. This is not meant to elide their distinctions but rather to vary the prose and avoid a repetitive quality. The term *California Indian people* was commonly deployed by Potts and others of her generation,

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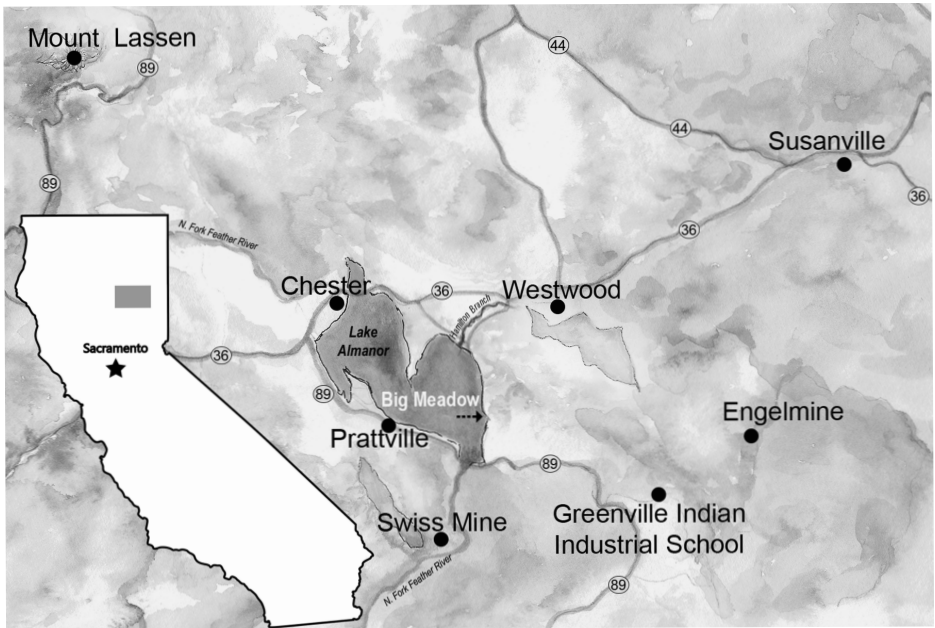
and its use continues among many contemporary California Natives. As the late Frank LaPena, professor emeritus of art and ethnic studies at my university, once explained to me, adding the word *people* to *California Indian* reclaims and humanizes a label that was otherwise generic, colonial, and legalistic. I use this terminology in that same spirit. Tribal nation names are used where known and typically as they appear in archival records. Mountain Maidu is the nomenclature presently preferred by the people indigenous to Potts's homelands, but they also recognize themselves as Northern Maidu (popular during Potts's own lifetime) and Northeastern Maidu. Occasionally these names are shortened to Maidu, a more encompassing term that also includes the Konkow and Nisenan speech communities, which are distinguished here by those designations. The terms *settlers* and *white people* are used synonymously; Potts used the latter most commonly, though on occasion she referred to homesteaders and other invaders of her homeland as settlers.

All spellings or transliterations of Mountain Maidu words or place-names are those of Potts, unless otherwise indicated. The decision to retain them as is preserves her voice and translation, and allows linguists, Maidu and otherwise, to appreciate popular mid-twentieth-century spellings and changes in vernacular renderings over time. The place Potts called Big Meadow was often referred to as Big Meadows (or the Meadows) by early settlers. Some Maidu have adopted this pluralization, which reflects early settler recognition that this mountain valley meadow had two lobes, a feature that became more pronounced after reservoir construction. The first superintendent of the Mission Indian School, the precursor to Greenville Indian Industrial School, distinguished Big Meadow families and pupils from the nearer Mountain Maidu camps and communities. His use of Big Meadows as a tribal affiliation became institutionalized in BIA records for a time. Singular or plural, this name refers to pupils whose families were Big Meadow residents. Greenville Indian School, as it was commonly known, is shortened to Greenville. The nearby town of Greenville, after which the federal government named the school, is always distinguished as such in the text to avoid confusion.

Finally, it is important to note that this is not intended to be an ethnography of the Mountain Maidu, although it contributes to a larger ethnohistorical portrait.<sup>11</sup> It is a life history that aims to illuminate how one individual apprehended, lived out, or refused the conditions and choices that unfolded in her family, time, and varied worlds—a “sample of one,” with all the attendant meanings



and possibilities.<sup>12</sup> It draws upon a rich, almost overwhelming, abundance of autobiographical forms and texts, and on infinite oral and written sources that can and must be read both against and “along the archival grain.”<sup>13</sup> It is in this spirit of writing settler colonial history in a “minor key” that this profile of a California Indian activist is offered.



Map showing points of interest in Marie's early life (locations are approximate). An arrow marks the location of her grandfather's allotment, where she lived as a child. Most of her family's allotments were sited along the eastern shore of Lake Almanor, formerly Big Meadow.

*Map by Nancy Wylie Design.*



## Prologue

### *Big Meadow Maidu*

Many writers like to tell how Indians scalped the pioneers. They forget that we kept them alive in the wilderness during those rough winters.

—Marie Potts, 1960

In spring 1870, overland emigrant D. D. Blunt encountered a Mountain Maidu hamlet while visually surveying a stretch of acreage along the eastern rim of Nakám Koyó, which settlers called Big Meadows—or simply the Meadows. Having learned to suffer American presence with equanimity, residents found no cause for alarm and watched him continue on his way. A few months later, indifference turned to concern when he returned and began fencing off a section of their ancestral village. Soon he built a house, staking more visible claim to the 160 acres delineated in his preemption certificate. Long before Blunt arrived, an ancient footpath bisected the hamlet on a roughly north–south axis. When settlers graded it for wagon use, the Maidu erected a fence on the road’s east side to protect a garden they had cultivated for fifteen years. Their residences remained on the west side, in closer proximity to the river that settlers called Hamilton Branch.

Blunt must have been perplexed when the Maidu did not simply pack up and leave once he settled in, but eventually he approached and tried to shoo them on their way. If puzzled before, he was surely astounded by their indignant refusal to budge, yielding no ground to the flimsy paper he produced. Material evidence of

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their long, prior occupancy was abundant. They did not fail to point it out. Here were their burial grounds; over there, eternal springs bubbled up to quench all creature thirsts. A dugout canoe reposed along the riverbank. Fallen trees formed strategic perches from which to spot the riparian life darting below. Basket traps were nestled in prime locations. He could see stretched and drying deerskins, fire pits, mortars, fishing nets, and basketry designed to serve every need, from cooking acorns to carrying infants. This was home, a settlement rich in memory and meaning, not some random spot to be vacated on demand.

Perhaps Blunt perused this domestic scene with some regret for his own role in Maidu dispossession. If so, he did not act on it, because Justice of the Peace John Seagraves eventually showed up to negotiate a compromise. Citing California's 1850 Act for the Government and Protection of Indians (Statute 133), Seagraves confirmed Maidu rights to traditional subsistence but insisted they reduce their land base. They agreed to confine themselves to a twenty-acre tract on the road's east side in exchange for a guarantee of their right to hold and inhabit these lands unmolested, in perpetuity. Terms were committed to writing, signed by Blunt and three nonliterate Maidu, who marked an X above their names: Doxam X, Dick X, and Bob X. Three homesteaders, John T. Hamilton, D. N. VanNorman, and John W. Starr, witnessed the negotiations and provided signatures. Perhaps they too harbored some sympathy for the Maidu's expulsion to the eastern boundaries of the village, but their vested interest was in retaining nearby a cooperative, and seasonally expendable, labor force.

In the Plumas County seat of Quincy, Seagraves documented the compromise in his September 26, 1870 docket:

State of California, County of Plumas, Seneca Township. At the request of parties interested, and under an act for the government of the Indians and protection of, passed April 22, 1850, page 82, Compiled Laws of California, Sec. 1-12, I proceeded to Mr. Blunt's ranch in Big Meadows, Township, County and State aforesaid, and set off for the use of the Indians residing thereon, all of that portion of said ranch lying east of the road and known as the Garden, belonging to said Indians, said land being in the SW $\frac{1}{4}$  of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$  of Sec. 10, 27 N, R8E, the same being bounded by a timber fence put there by Indians years ago, but still visible, said Indians agreeing and perfectly understanding the dividing of the same; also D. D. Blunt, the claimant to said land by government file, being present and agreeing to the same, all parties fully understanding the arrangement.<sup>1</sup>

Hereafter, the Maidu families restricted their lives to this small fraction of their original hamlet—dwelling, raising children, and burying loved ones in this ancestral place. Like their intrusive American neighbors, they “improved” the land. They rebuilt dilapidated fencing, erected a ceremonial roundhouse, diverted springs and streams, planted an orchard with twenty-two fruit trees, acquired and pastured livestock, grew hay, and built barns. They expertly adapted to limitations colonizers forced upon them, but this would not be enough.

Blunt vacated his preemption claim with the Marysville Land Office, in 1870, in favor of a homestead application. He filed this in spring 1873, in the Susanville Land Office, which inherited jurisdiction over Big Meadow upon its February 1871 creation. Five years later, on July 30, 1878, Blunt received his patent. A widower whose health was fading, he could no longer manage the ranch and was living in Quincy with his daughter and son-in-law, Mary and Aaron Drew.<sup>2</sup> Half the property was already sold to Abram Holmes, and on May 6, 1882, Alexander R. Thompson and Henry Kloppenberg bought the remaining eighty-acre portion, inclusive of the Maidu village. Thompson immediately moved his family into the ranch house and, by February 6, 1883, was sole title-holder.<sup>3</sup> Or so he imagined. Despite prior knowledge of the Seagraves agreement and the bustling hamlet on the property’s southeastern arm, Thompson was bent on ejecting the Maidu. Having labored for a dozen years to accommodate themselves to the smaller but supposedly protected confines, they stood their ground. Thompson hired an attorney and sued.<sup>4</sup>

The case was heard August 28, 1883, in Plumas County Superior Court. Plaintiff attorney R. H. F. Variel asked in his filing for the defendants’ “true names” to be known (they were previously enumerated as pseudonyms, “Joe Doe, Richard Rose and John Stiles, etc.”), for the court to find their claim invalid, for his client to be issued a writ of possession quieting his title, and for Thompson to recover associated costs. The defendants’ attorneys, D. W. Jenks and J. D. Goodwin, argued two lines of defense. First, the Big Meadow Maidu had never ceded to any nation, state, individual, or government the title to their aboriginal lands; nor had any government extended to them a promise or means of future sustenance and support. Second, in September 1870 they had agreed to vacate a portion of their village in exchange for permanent ownership and occupancy of the current site. Jenks and Goodwin argued that both Blunt’s homestead patent and Thompson’s title were illegitimate. To substantiate this claim, they turned optimistically to history and a sense of justice. They identified Doaksum Sr. as the “chief of a tribe or family of Indians known as the ‘Big Meadows Indians’ and called in their

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own language, ‘Nahkomas.’” They asserted time immemorial ownership and occupancy of the land prior to October 1, 1492, previous to which their clients’ ancestors had “discovered, entered upon and claimed and occupied said tract of land, and built dwellings thereon.” They argued Maidu continuous occupancy and use, as well as development to the tune of three hundred dollars. As proof that title was never extinguished, they reviewed the federal government’s failure to treat with Big Meadow Maidu or even to ratify the treaties negotiated with other California Indians, including those gathered at John Bidwell’s Chico ranch on August 1, 1851.<sup>5</sup> Finally, attorneys for the defendants reminded the court that their clients’ nonliterate status rendered them wholly dependent upon honorable and oral representations of the law, as when they conferred with Seagraves and Blunt.

Without benefit of jurors, Judge G. G. Clough rendered a short statement of findings on November 22, 1883, affirming Thompson’s title and right to recover costs incurred to quiet it. Jenks and Goodwin were undeterred. On April 23, 1884, they appealed to the California Supreme Court on behalf of their clients, identified as “Doaksum Sr., Doaksum, Jr. and Perconnum, appellants, and John Doe et als., defendants.” Humored by the notion that aboriginal title was not extinguished, Variel, in his pompous response to the court, summoned the language of conquest and racial superiority: “In fact, defendants asserted a title claimed to have descended from sovereigns occupying the premises away back in the misty past, before Columbus landed on the Western Continent. But they, at the same time, claimed that they had no written language or evidence of their title save traditionary lore.”

Literacy was an uncommonly effective weapon of imperial conquest. Imposition of codified over customary law intentionally and disproportionately disadvantaged Indigenous peoples whose socioeconomic systems were rooted in orality. Even after Big Meadow Maidu affixed their mark to Seagraves’s written words, they lost their rights. A cornerstone of the lower court’s ruling was that Big Meadow Maidu had failed to assert title in a timely fashion—if indeed they held one. The U.S. Land Commission would have dismissed it, regardless. Yet the fact remains that the Maidu had no way of knowing the United States would preempt their lands as surplus public property. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which had ceded this formerly Mexican territory to the United States, theoretically protected private title granted under Spanish and Mexican rule. Even if Big Meadow Maidu possessed private title as recognized under English common law, chances are slim they would have managed to retain it. With rare exception, after American conquest, the combined effect of linguistic differences, nonliteracy, and state and

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federal failure to effectively communicate the process and deadline for presenting private title to the land commission, in concert with corrupt land speculators and ambiguous legal tradition, further alienated Indigenous people from their lands. Variel dismissed all linguistic contingencies and notions of customary law where Blunt's agreement was concerned. Instead, he compounded the insult by enumerating a litany of codified state and federal laws and precedents that supposedly rendered the defendants' claims to "Indian title" void.

Galled by this Maidu challenge to manifest destiny, Variel argued, "They assert an independent paramount claim, having its inception in the shadowy past, and which is alleged to be adverse, sovereign, and superior to that of either the United States Government or its grantors, whose existence and supremacy has been unquestioned, since a period long prior to the time when Columbus first unfurled his strange banners on the shores of the New World." He mocked, "Appellant's defense, although unique in its absurdity, has not the merit of entire originality," citing a similar, and unsuccessful, Louisiana Supreme Court case. Moving next to Seagraves's agreement, he quickly dispatched Maidu rights to occupancy and possession, arguing that the premise for the original agreement was flawed, since relevant sections of Statute 133 had been repealed. Moreover, Blunt did not hold patent at the moment of compromise and could not, therefore, define future disposition.

When the case initially moved forward on appeal, the local press declared that the California Supreme Court was famous for its "queer decisions."<sup>6</sup> This was not one. On February 25, 1886, it upheld the lower court's ruling. The editor of the *WASP* observed sardonically that when the Supreme Court justices solemnly contended that "the relation of the Indians to the lands they occupied, their title thereto, their power of alienation and the mode of its accomplishment were questions much discussed in the early days of our Government," they were obfuscating a central truth: "The value of these discussions to the Indian's interest was somewhat impaired by the fact that he was excluded from them. His part in them was a modest one—he was the thing discussed."<sup>7</sup>

### **Before California: The Ancestral Mountain Maidu World**

Mountain Maidu settled into their alpine homelands at the convergence of the southern Cascades and northern Sierra long before settlers invaded.<sup>8</sup> "Time immemorial" expresses this depth of occupation in legal parlance and squares with Mountain Maidu histories.<sup>9</sup> Mountain Maidu make their homes throughout their ancestral territory and the wider world. For this reason, it is important to

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underscore that past tense is not used below to describe a people but rather to describe historical patterns predating and largely altered by American occupation. The Mountain Maidu language is closely related to the Konkow and Nisenan dialects spoken by neighboring groups, suggesting shared ancient ancestry. Immediately adjacent homelands and neighboring peoples include the Atsugewi and Achumawi to the north; Paiute and Washoe to the east; and Yana/Yahi, Konkow, and Nisenan to the northwest, west, and south, respectively. Maidu men traditionally found marriage partners among the Atsugewi.<sup>10</sup> After settler invasion produced refugee communities of displaced Native people, Mountain Maidu occasionally found it necessary to protect themselves from raiding groups, including those Marie's grandparents called Mill Creeks.<sup>11</sup>

Average annual temperatures ranging from the low twenties to the mid-eighties, heavy winter precipitation, and seasonal resource availability determined settlement patterns above all else. Marie's Big Meadow homelands are forty-five hundred feet above sea level. In fall and winter, preferred village sites were those strategically perched along the sloping ridge of vast bottomlands that became blanketed in snow, at times seven feet deep, during the coldest months. In spring and early summer, this location afforded easy access to lush meadowlands below and to higher conifer forests, where deer and other game retreated and where temporary summer camps were often established.<sup>12</sup> Before settlers came, Mountain Maidu sustained themselves through hunting, fishing, and gathering the profuse woodland and riparian flora and fauna available in temperate months. More importantly, they learned to preserve and store sufficient quantities of food to carry them through the severe winters, when resources were scarce and more difficult to harvest. From the earliest age, children learned through storytelling, ceremony, and observation to respect the interdependence of all beings. The fragility of life during long, harsh winters helped cultivate respect for medicine people and the wisdom of elders, whose deep knowledge of their environment was central to human survival. For all nature's predictability, its forces, including age-old human greed, brought aberrations in resource availability. Generosity was a guiding social value and necessary attribute for leadership, while principles of reciprocity governed everyday life.

The first American emigrants to homestead in Nakám Koyó were ill prepared to weather the severe winters and survived because Maidu people fed them from their own precious stores. Marie's grandfather, called Big Meadow Bill by Americans, was known for such life-sustaining generosity. "After I grew older, I heard many stories of the kind deeds and courtesies he extended to the white settlers as well

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as his own people. How he saved the lives of white settlers by taking them fish, jerky and dried roots, and showing them the edible tubers in the early spring.”<sup>13</sup>

### Ancestors

Big Meadow Bill earned the appellation Hukespem (Wise One) in adulthood, but as a twin, he was recognized as special from the moment of birth. He and his brother were born to a Hat Creek (Atsugewi) mother and a Mountain Maidu father sometime between 1835 and 1845.<sup>14</sup> In the mid-1860s, Bill participated in a cycle of violence between the Mountain Maidu and Mill Creek enemies, which



**Figure 1.** Marie's grandfather Hukespem, also known as Big Meadow Bill, circa 1900.

*Photograph by Eli Piazzoni.*

was covered in the local press. The prelude to this sensational account occurred in July 1866. A settler traveling “over the mountain” from Taylorsville to Big Meadow, on July 31, reported that upon his arrival, an agitated and frightened Maidu man approached him. Exclaiming that Mill Creeks had killed two men and two women on the Meadow’s west side that morning, he wondered if the traveler had seen any of his kinsmen coming from Indian Valley.<sup>16</sup> A customary pattern of reprisal and revenge explains why Big Meadow Maidu, in league with their Indian Valley counterparts, subsequently organized an avenging foray into Mill Creek country. A month or so later, adequately provisioned with armaments and food, they advanced on enemy territory. Their triumphal return home in mid-October occasioned an impressive reception described in a letter published by the *Plumas National*. Replete with stereotypic embellishment, one paragraph deserves note: “The lion of the evening was an Indian named Big Bill, the one who shot the Mill Creek; and as a token of regard his dark-skinned brethren and sisters kept brushing him with small twigs which each one carried. Another honor which they conferred on the successful warrior, was fasting him a certain number of days after the shooting of the enemy to appease the wrath the ‘Great Spirit’ might feel toward the tribe.”<sup>16</sup>

According to Potts, Mill Creeks murdered Hukespem’s first wife, Phoebe, with whom he had several children. The July 1866 attack likely marked the instance of Phoebe’s death and may or may not have been the same point at which Phoebe’s sister Mariah, Marie’s grandmother, was kidnapped. According to Potts’s account, several families were temporarily camped on the Meadow’s west side while the men, employed by Americans, were working on a wagon road. At some point, the men left camp for several days to attend a Fourth of July “big time” at Bahapki, a Native village established by General John Bidwell on his Chico ranch. Cash prizes annually lured regional competitors to footraces and other athletic competitions. While the men were away, Mill Creeks reportedly crept into camp, committed murders, and stole two girls, Nellie Jenkins and Mariah. Potts guessed that Mariah was about fourteen.<sup>17</sup> If the kidnapping occurred the summer after Big Bill’s mid-October return from Mill Creek, it fits neatly into the cycle of attack and revenge that Roland Dixon later chronicled.<sup>18</sup>

Carted off and enslaved, the two girls were bound nightly, hands and feet, to prevent escape while their captors slept. One night, as the story goes, Mariah wriggled close to Nellie and released her compatriot’s hands. Nellie sat up, unlashd her ankles, and fled alone into the darkness. Mariah’s captivity dragged on. Assigned to attend the wife and children of the Mill Creek leader, she absorbed

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enough of their language and setting to plan a getaway. This opportunity arose when Americans—probably vigilante militia, though she assumed soldiers—attacked. With her captors distracted, she slipped into a hiding place she had earlier discovered along a rocky gorge. Mariah remembered the onslaught raging for days. She waited patiently for stillness to settle over the canyon. Finding her way home was an exhausting ordeal. Some accounts have her gone midsummer to fall; others suggest she was captive more than a year and pregnant upon escape.<sup>19</sup> Intrepid young Mariah returned to mother Phoebe's surviving children and the five more she bore Big Meadow Bill. For the remainder of their lives, these two exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of adversity and socioeconomic upheaval.<sup>20</sup>

They witnessed the steady invasion of their forest and meadowlands by emigrant overlanders and argonauts from around the world. These newcomers commandeered rivers and polluted streams with mining tailings, fenced the open meadowlands for agricultural production, and carried counterproductive values into a social landscape steeped in centuries-old traditions designed to preserve the common good. Hukespem could deal swiftly with sporadic terror of Mill Creeks, but Americans posed a persistent form of violence to livelihoods and autonomy. Maidu watched these invaders with curiosity and occasional amusement. Initially, they coped with interlopers by getting out of the way, unable to foresee that within two generations their expansive homelands would be endlessly partitioned and depleted. Where once they exploited a wide swath of terrain flush with indigenous flora and fauna, husbandry of imported species now consumed disproportionate volumes of water and land, restricting their subsistence resources and movement.<sup>21</sup>

Transformations to the social landscape were profound. The 1860 census, California's first federal enumeration, offers a revealing portrait of Big Meadow and the wider Seneca Township. Notoriously ambiguous, even in their failings census records offer spectacular insight into socioeconomic conditions. The 1860 census records 480 individuals but entirely erases the Maidu people who populated this township. Absence from the formal record might be chalked up to several rationales, from language barriers to cultural and geographic distance. Still, the enumerator's failure to bridge such gaps with even a cursory estimate confirms that Maidu people did not figure into the new order of things, however much their land and labor—manual, sexual, and reproductive—were absolutely essential to it. Fifty-three Chinese gold miners, roughly 10 percent of the township's population, were last to be counted. While their numbers and enumeration foreshadow the

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1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, their occupation and masculine gender align with the township's wider profile.

Non-Native women were scarce in 1850s northern California. This was certainly the case in Seneca Township, where 432 men and only forty-eight women were enumerated. Most were wives and minor daughters of American homesteaders or immigrants plying riparian channels for placer gold, although occasionally women worked in placer mining. Such was the case for thirty-nine-year-old Victoria Lara, a single Mexican immigrant house-holding with Erasmus Kercher of Saxony. The non-Native population was youthful, with most adults between twenty and forty years old; thirteen were age forty to fifty, and none were in their sixth decade of life.

Miners far outnumbered homesteaders in Seneca Township during the first decade of statehood. Some were Americans who journeyed overland, but most hailed from international ports of call. Making a protracted voyage around the Horn, or over the Isthmus of Nicaragua, they were unceremoniously disgorged into the rough-and-tumble streets of San Francisco. Anxious to transform their lives, here or back in their countries of origin, they scrambled and slogged their way into the Sierra foothills and up the North Fork of the Feather River. By 1860, Mountain Maidu country was populated with miners from Chile, Mexico, Turkey, England, Ireland, Baden, Prussia, Switzerland, France, and China. Between 1860 and 1870, Seneca Township lost one-fifth of its population, as placer mining's luster faded.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, ranching and dairy farming gained ground, both figuratively and literally, as Americans began claiming Big Meadow acreage by the thousands under the Swamp and Overflow Act. By the 1870s, first-generation homesteaders like Peter Olsen were protesting excesses allowed under this law.<sup>23</sup> During the 1860s, a residential base capable of sustaining schoolteachers, gardeners, craftsmen, blacksmiths, loggers, hoteliers, a few merchants, and at least two physicians developed. The Chinese mining community remained active, but some settled into cooking and gardening. Overall, more non-Native women, family households, and older adults populated the township. Some aged in place, but others were recent arrivals, such as fifty-three-year-old David Drew Blunt.

No Maidu are enumerated in Seneca Township's federal census until 1880, but those born in the 1860s and 1870s, like Hukespem's children, were integral to the wage-based economy, many by choice but never as equal beneficiaries. Older Maidu, such as Mariah and Big Meadow Bill, supplemented household resources through traditional means: gathering, hunting, and fishing. This mixed

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subsistence strategy was not simply a function of their marginalized position in the encroaching agricultural and cash economy. Like people everywhere, they preferred their own foodways and continued to pursue them, exercising a measure of autonomy over the pace and scale of acculturation.<sup>24</sup> Yet no matter how peacefully or purposefully Big Meadow Maidu labored in new or old ways, daily life was troubled by jarring worldviews and material outcomes that contradicted centuries-old values and expectations.

John Seagraves settled the Maidu's conflict with Blunt by defining sufficient land to meet their "necessary wants" as defined under Statute 133, Section 2. Contrary to humane pretense, this language encoded how dispossession was enacted statewide—on terms that satisfied the particularistic needs of local settler economies. Seagraves was not exercising moral suasion by negotiating an agreement between Blunt and the Maidu, but rather a California-specific mechanism for removal or transfer by degree. The four American signatories cast themselves as benevolent overlords to the Nahkomas while preserving their self-interest.<sup>25</sup> Despite forced dispersal of the Big Meadow Maidu from this ancestral hamlet, in ten years' time these same lands sheltered one of their descendants who would become a vocal advocate for her people and lands. Mountain Maidu was her natal tongue, but English-language literacy was her weapon.

### **Stolen Land and Lives: Genocide, Rejected Treaties, Social Reformers**

After California gained statehood, the federal government initiated the process of expropriating Indigenous lands as "unoccupied" public surplus, a specious status to be sure. The Preemption Act of 1841 anticipated and fostered U.S. westward expansion.<sup>26</sup> American immigrants were already squatting on Native land when Mexico controlled Alta California, but after gold discovery and statehood, immigration accelerated, and Native resistance along with it. Miners and settlers wanted Native people out of the way and retaliated indiscriminately to "depredations" against their possessions and interloping presence by striking back at the collective California Indian body.<sup>27</sup> Vigilante militias, head bounties, and scorched earth tactics made manifest the unquenchable bloodthirstiness of California settler colonial ambitions. As one scholar notes, even seasoned military officers and Indian agents were stunned by the atrocities that presumably God-fearing people perpetrated on fellow human beings.<sup>28</sup> These were not shameful, secret, backroom dealings. The mid-nineteenth-century press observed this bloodshed with interest. The rare editorial condemned "civilized" society, but newsmen of the day were predominantly boosters of genocide.<sup>29</sup>

A month after California joined the Union, Congress passed legislation creating a treaty commission. George W. Barbour, Reddick McKee, and O. M. Wozencraft began their work in March 1851. In January 1852, they forwarded to the U.S. Senate eighteen treaties negotiated with captains and headmen of perhaps one-half to one-third of the autochthonous polities within state boundaries.<sup>30</sup> In California, settlers who had earlier insisted that Native people be moved out of their way were now beside themselves, certain that lands earmarked for reservations held vast mineral and agricultural wealth. In response, the state senate and assembly passed resolutions by a margin of twenty-five to six, renouncing the treaties and mandating that California's U.S. senators oppose them before Congress. On July 8, 1852, the treaties were rejected in executive session. Sealed and locked away in U.S. Senate archives, they were scrubbed from settler colonial memory as the citizenry, state government, and federal government continued to consume treaty-ceded and -reserved lands. Under pressure to resolve California's "Indian problem," the federal government created four military and several farm reservations, beginning with the 1853 establishment of Tejon Reservation.<sup>31</sup> Some reservations were populated through forced marches that remain impaled in the hearts of contemporary descendants.<sup>32</sup> Corruption, inadequate provisions, traditional enemies shoved into close quarters—a thousand problems large and small—rendered these measures largely ineffectual. Most Indian people remained homeless, without the meager protection of reservation lands. Continually pushed from ancestral homelands and temporary campsites, they struggled to survive. Many did not.

Social reformers and missionary organizations, including Philadelphia's Indian Rights Association (IRA) and the Northern California Indian Association (NCIA), took note of these cruel conditions and sought relief for people whose suffering lay squarely at the feet of the U.S. government. Their efforts led to "rediscovery" of the rejected treaties. Traveling to Colusa County in 1902, to identify land or patrons who could help the county's homeless Indian population, San José NCIA member the Reverend H. C. Meredith learned of an agreement signed around the time of statehood, promising land for Indian people. A local journalist had been the interpreter at these negotiations, and his uncle had been a signatory. Meredith's news incited NCIA research into this treaty and a memorial to the president for relief of homeless Indians. California's senator Thomas Bard and IRA's Samuel Brosius induced Senate clerks to search out the elusive document, and the sordid story of not one but eighteen treaties came to light.<sup>33</sup> The ensuing moral outrage fueled the long and contentious legislative process resulting in the 1928 California Indians Jurisdictional Act (CIJA), which allowed a suit for broken

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treaty promises to be brought against the federal government in the U.S. Court of Claims. Meanwhile, more immediate relief for homeless Indians was pursued through the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA), which appointed NCIA attorney and executive secretary C. E. Kelsey as “California special agent” in 1905. He was tasked with producing a census of non-reservation Indians documenting blood quanta and residential status; this list formed the basis for purchasing a series of small rancherias.<sup>34</sup> Culled from meager surplus public lands typically lacking arable soil and sufficient water, they were taken into trust by the federal government, becoming home to refugee communities of culturally and linguistically distinct peoples who intermarried, created new kin groups, and have since engaged in generations of place-making to recover and patch together traditions and aboriginal worlds ravaged by colonization.

### **Colliding Worlds: Intercultural Intimacy, Violence, and Love**

When Alexander Thompson drove the Maidu from their village, John T. Hamilton was already deceased. An early comer to Big Meadow, Hamilton had settled on its east side, near the branch of the Feather River’s North Fork now bearing his family name. Like other Big Meadow agricultural enterprises, his was dependent upon Maidu labor. Feudal relations were common between homesteaders and the Big Meadow Maidu families who were allowed—even encouraged—to camp on the margins of ranching operations that had subsumed their traditional territory and livelihoods. As an 1885 newspaper declared, “The Big Meadows tribe of Indians number about 200 and are divided among the different ranches, each having its separate campoody and set of retainers. The men find employment part of the year working for the ranchers, who are entirely dependent upon them.”<sup>35</sup> Men became skilled cowboys and ranch hands. They defined new ways of being Maidu men. This included turning to employers for intervention when the likes of Blunt and Thompson threatened to erode the provisional accommodations they had made to settler presence. Maidu women’s domestic, reproductive, and sexual labor was no less critical to this landscape, as Marie’s ancestral family history demonstrates. The lives of Hukespem’s children and grandchildren bore the diverse hallmarks of these fluid and turbulent times.

Land theft was only one frame through which Big Meadow Maidu apprehended distinctions between their own values and those of the Americans for whom they toiled. Treatment of Maidu women and children was another. Native women’s vulnerability during the gold rush is legendary. Historian Albert L. Hurtado documents the rampant violence perpetrated against them without flattening

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a landscape of conjugal relations between non-Native men and Native women that included instances of love, mutual respect, convenience, strategic alliance, and the like.<sup>36</sup> Their more remote location delayed and diminished the wholesale nature of violence that women suffered in more southerly reaches of the Sierra, but this does not mean that Mountain Maidu women escaped rape, exploitation, and abuse. Like their southerly sisters, they brought their own cultural values and expectations to the realms of affection and intimacy into which they willingly entered during this period of intercultural encounter. As in other colonial and cross-cultural contexts, only occasionally were they met.<sup>37</sup> Yet it was children produced through these voluntary and involuntary unions who most keenly reflected the complexities of a settler colonial project that reduced identity and mixed ancestry to a blood-quantum calculus.<sup>38</sup> Post-gold rush news columnists regularly offered unflinching commentary on the county's reproductive demographics. Moral and racial anxieties were inseparably coupled in these discourses. In 1877 the *Plumas National* sniped, "It is said that the crop of half-breeds in the Meadows was never better."<sup>39</sup>

Seneca Township was astonishingly cosmopolitan for such a rural and remote setting. When the 1850s and '60s mining boom subsided, many non-Native miners joined the agrarian economy, finding wives among the second generation of overland emigrants. Others returned home long enough to court spouses or collect families left behind. As agriculture expanded, Big Meadow women worked as domestic laborers, often for the same families as male kin. Listed as "laundresses" and "washerwomen" in census records, these wives and daughters labored in settings where they were vulnerable to sexual exploitation, as evidenced by the growing population of unacknowledged children fathered by non-Maidu men, who freely abandoned their children's Maidu mothers. Native dependence upon settlers for wage employment and land occupancy "rights" buttressed Maidu women's vulnerability and limited their capacity to flee abusive circumstances.

These were the social conditions under which Hukespem's daughter Josie Bill gave birth to her first two children, Marie's half siblings, John and Lizzette Mason.<sup>40</sup> Their father, John E. Hamilton (b. 1862), was the only son of the elder Hamilton, party to the Seagraves negotiation. Following his death in 1878, Hamilton's widow, Sarah, maintained the ranch, raising her young children there. Josie worked as a ranch laundress well into the 1890s, and her first two children were conceived while John E. Hamilton was splitting his time between Big Meadow and Shasta County, where he owned property and, in 1890, met and married Samantha Thatcher. Josie gave birth to their first child, John, in November 1891.<sup>41</sup> Lizzette Pansy followed

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in 1893. In April 1894, Hamilton's brother-in-law John T. Becraft, another settler descendant, took over day-to-day management of Hamilton ranch, which his wife, Hamilton's sister Marietta, inherited after her mother's 1892 death. Josie's employment continued, while Hamilton attended to his Shasta County home and wife as her baby's due date approached. In March 1895, Samantha Hamilton gave birth. Their daughter lived, but Samantha died soon after.<sup>42</sup> In mid-fall 1895, Josie Bill gave birth to Marie, her third child and second daughter. Years later, after becoming a mother herself, Marie learned the truth of her conception. Unlike her brother and sister, she was conceived through rape. The indigenized name Bearcraft has been passed through several generations as her genitor's surname. Many years later, she offered some commentary on this subject to a newspaper reporter: "They called the child a half-breed. Some of the men weren't proud of it. I don't know why they were ashamed of fathering a child. But that's white society for you. My father was one of those sons-a-bitches."<sup>43</sup>

Josie's experiences of intercultural intimacy and Mountain Maidu motherhood are usefully counterposed with those of her sister, Jennie Bill Piazzoni. Brothers Christopher and Baptiste Piazzoni arrived in northern California in the mid-1860s, argonauts from Canton Ticino, on the Swiss-Italian borderlands. By 1870, almost three thousand of their countrymen had immigrated to California, typically with sponsorship from the Swiss government and previously migrated families. After trying their luck in the goldfields, most settled in rural areas and took up agricultural pursuits founded on generations of Old World expertise. California's dairy industry owes its start to Swiss emigrants, whose heritage is still visible in Monterey, San Luis Obispo, and Sonoma Counties.<sup>44</sup>

Big Meadow drew its share of Swiss farmers in the 1860s and 1870s. Its topography, high altitude, and snowy winters were no challenge; here was a diminutive version of the Alps. In fact, late-nineteenth-century tourists habitually likened the area to Switzerland in published letters and travelogues. Local residents swelled with pride at poetic renderings of sun-kissed meadows against a backdrop of snowcapped peaks and rivers rushing through sheer canyon walls. This was the landscape that drew miners and farmers to Seneca Township. The North Fork of the Feather River, which meandered lazily through marshy Big Meadow, dropped precipitously at its southern terminal, carving deep channels through ancient rock with stunning gravitational force. From the 1860s through 1930s, a small community of hardy folk, as eccentric as they were optimistic, inhabited the Seneca—or North Fork—district. Here along steep canyon ravines, a rugged stretch of narrow, unpaved road traces the contours of the North Fork at the

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summit of its mighty race down to the Sacramento Valley. Drownings like that of Caribou miner Henry Keep, in 1890, were dark reminders of its lethal and magnificent force: “It is said that the angry waters of the North Fork never give up their dead!”<sup>45</sup>

The brothers Piazzoni eventually found their way to Big Meadow and its promise of mineral wealth, but it was not their initial destination. When Chris Piazzoni left Intragna, Switzerland, he was headed for Petaluma, where he was recorded in 1870 at thirty years old. He and “Faldo,” a relative aged forty, worked as “laborers,” along with twenty-three-year-old “woodchopper” Baptiste. Christopher returned home for a time, which Guy Métraux notes was common among Swiss immigrants, before returning with another family member in 1876. He and eighteen-year-old Fidele Piazzoni, both listed as miners, arrived in New York from Le Havre, aboard the *Labrador*. By 1880, Baptiste, a lifelong bachelor, and Christopher had settled in Plumas County, staking multiple claims in the Seneca mining district.<sup>46</sup> The Piazzoni “Swiss Mine” cabin still stands in Plumas National Forest, three miles west of the once wild and woolly mining town of Seneca. Christopher settled down to a prosaic Big Meadow life. The U.S. census shows that in 1880, the household of this single “farmer and dairyman” included twenty-year-old Italian-born Francisco Berini (or Perini), a “servant.”<sup>47</sup> Immediately adjacent were Hamilton Ranch, the contiguous portion of Blunt’s ranch—now owned by Abram Holmes—and the “moveable” households of some fifty Maidu, including, Old Doaksum and Mary, John and Roxy [Roxie] Peconum, John and Mary Meadows, and Old Bill and his wife, Mary. Old Bill is listed as a “hunter”; Mary (Mariah) is said to be “keeping campoody.” Sixteen-year-old Jennie is single, hinting at the courtship that soon turned these neighbors into affines. Two years later, Thompson banished them.

Jennie’s marriage to Piazzoni bestowed a level of belonging on the Bill family denied them by American settlers, such as Thompson and the fathers of Josie’s three eldest children. Perhaps Piazzoni’s immigrant experience, his “exogenous otherness,” made him more enlightened and humane.<sup>48</sup> Certainly, his household was one of the most linguistically diverse in Big Meadow, with children, parents, and extended kin regularly interacting in Maidu, Italian, and English. The intimate encounters among this second generation of Mountain Maidu, American, and Swiss peoples produced a third generation of cousins who shared a remarkable intercultural heritage. Sadly, some did not survive the negative repercussions of being Indigenous in late-nineteenth-century California.



1

## Big Meadow Maidu Schoolgirl

Please Mish Tubody, I want needle . . . to sew doll.

—*Marie Mason, fall 1900*

Marie was born in the crisp fall months of 1895, when apple orchards were being harvested.<sup>1</sup> Welcomed into the fold of her large extended family, she joined the multitude of mixed-ancestry siblings and cousins comprising the second generation of her family to be born since Americans began arriving in Big Meadow. By now, Mountain Maidu tradition was irrevocably altered. Homesteaders and miners brought change; but so too did federal policy shaped thousands of miles away in Washington, D.C., and in the drawing rooms of wealthy eastern elites. From these distant and lofty perches, “Indian reformers” launched an assault on tribal estates, religions, languages, and cultures.<sup>2</sup> Although the architects and advocates of this campaign articulated their vision in the language of “Americanizing” and “civilizing,” its goal was forced assimilation or ethnocide. Bearing in mind that land is the critical commodity in settler colonialism, it is easy to see how removing tribal peoples to western reservations once served settler colonial logic.<sup>3</sup> However, as westward expansion exhausted available lands, reservations fell under new scrutiny. In the same way the ideology of manifest destiny furthered settler colonialism, so did late-nineteenth-century Americanizing and civilizing ideologies.

The concept of a communally held tribal estate was always contrary to American capitalist ideology, but now its last refuge—the reservation—was assailed as a vector of poverty and disease. Reformers set about “rescuing” Native people through the 1887 General Allotment Act, or Dawes Act. This legislation aimed to

produce citizen-farmers by dividing reservation acreage and distributing it among adult heads of households; “surplus” lands were then opened to settlers. Far from benign or paternalistic, the Dawes Act devastated Native societies. Reservations, for all their shortcomings, endowed American Indians with a land base, tribal sovereignty, and a measure of protection against genocidal instincts that, in California, Christian “civilized” settlers acted upon with unapologetic savagery.<sup>4</sup>

Allotment operated in tandem with a powerful apparatus and symbol of settler colonialism: the boarding school. The earliest and most celebrated of these schools, powerful sites of forced assimilation in Australia, Canada, and the United States, was Pennsylvania’s Carlisle Indian Industrial School, founded in 1879 by retired army captain Richard Henry Pratt. After the Dawes Act was passed, off-reservation boarding schools proliferated across the American West. Removing children from their families and communities, the traditional agents and sites of enculturation, they promised to detribalize and Americanize the younger generation. White Christian women were the most enthusiast proponents of these schools, finding no contradiction in their claims to superior moral and maternal values while simultaneously supporting the separation of Native children from their own mothers.<sup>5</sup>

Marie and her extended family experienced these reforms in a highly localized fashion. Mountain Maidu rights of occupancy were ever diminishing, and their condition was grim indeed when the Indian Office began allotting them surplus public lands in 1894, under authority of the Dawes Act. Though short-lived and inadequate to their needs, this process brought Marie’s kin a moment and measure of security in the wake of rejected treaties, no reservation, and the ever-encroaching capitalist economy.<sup>6</sup> Like allotment, the Bill family experience with boarding school was equally idiosyncratic. It began with the development of a mission school, south of Big Meadow, that her large, intercultural family exploited strategically. While Christian reformers, organizations, and institutions foreclosed on some Mountain Maidu traditions, Native people demonstrated intelligence and resilience in their interaction with the school and its early administrators, who were drawn from the local community. Taking a wide-angle view, this chapter demonstrates how Marie’s kin exercised Native agency to greatly varying effect. Marie’s experience was even more distinctive, as she arrived just as the school was experiencing a changing of the guard. The federal government’s authoritarian hand became increasingly visible and inflexible in their small community. Marie’s childhood and adolescence were shaped by forces beyond her youthful control, but she proved to be a quick study—bright, ambitious, and lively. For

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better or worse, the school eventually became her anchor in a sea of constant change.

### **Chenkutpem: Big Meadow Granddaughter**

In 1894, Hukespem and Mariah, along with their children and a handful of grandchildren, were each granted 160 acres of federal trust land through the Dawes Act of 1887. Most Bill family allotments encompassed portions of their ancestral hamlet along the eastern rim of Big Meadow, from which Thompson had expelled them a decade prior, though Hukespem's was the only one with water, so most of the family camped there.<sup>7</sup> Although Marie, born the following year, was never allotted, she was blessed with knowledge and memories tied to this place and her beloved grandparents. The enchantment of falling asleep as a panorama of stars glistened down on murmuring glades and the vast forest floor never left her. The pine canopy sheltering their cedar bark house came to nocturnal life with the baritone strains of owls holding forth in wizened dialogue. Her grandfather's hunting prowess and ability to care for his family was a lasting point of pride. How amazed she was in later years to realize what a profound education Hukespem imparted as she ambled along playfully at his side, absorbing instruction about the expansive realm of beings that shared their small corner of the universe. These were lessons about mutual respect and generosity toward all beings that she carried later into urban contexts and that informed her steadfast commitment to giving freely of her own time and money, even when she had little of either to spare. Tender remembrances of these fleeting years were embodied in the name Mariah gave her: Chenkutpem (One with Sharp Eyes). The appellation was endearingly tied to the special relationship Marie and Hukespem shared. A little sprite, she awaited his daily return from hunting and fishing expeditions with anticipation for the treats he invariably brought her. Training her gaze on the slim apertures between towering sugar pines, Marie would announce his imminent arrival while he was still off in the distant woods. The superior vision of her granddaughter and namesake reminded Mariah that she and Hukespem were growing old. This energetic little child who brought such joy to their household would soon join her siblings and cousins at school.<sup>8</sup>

### **Mission Indian School**

Between 1890 and 1897, a humble precursor to the federal, off-reservation boarding schools that multiplied across the western landscape emerged in fits and starts about fifteen miles southeast of Big Meadow. The government did not

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originate the school, but its affiliation with Christian reform organizations like the Women's National Indian Association (WNIA) fostered its development. In 1897 the government purchased the land and buildings comprising the Mission Indian School (MIS), changing its name to Greenville Indian Industrial School (hereafter called Greenville).<sup>9</sup>

The school's small size, rural environs, and historical origins endowed it with a different character than other off-reservation boarding schools. It grew from the modest efforts of two ranching cousins, Amelia Martin and Charles Hall. Around 1888, Martin began missionary work in Indian Valley. She ministered to the ill; offered women lessons in cooking, sewing, and housekeeping; and taught Sunday school for children and adults. Her school was originally hosted in Abro Johnson's home, but opposition from other camp members forced its relocation to the Martin ranch. Around this time, several Maidu fathers living near Hall were angered when their children were denied public school admission, so he began instructing them in basic subjects. Soon he began looking for funds to purchase school supplies and to construct a suitable building on his ranch, several miles east of the village of Greenville.<sup>10</sup> In 1889 Hall turned to civil rights activist Albion W. Tourgée for suggestions. Soon to distinguish himself as plaintiff's attorney in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), Tourgée, in turn, contacted Amelia Quinton, WNIA president. Thus began the MIS.<sup>11</sup>

Quinton nurtured Martin's Sunday school efforts, but her real interest was the fledgling day school. Through a combination of appeals to the federal government and national publicity in the *Indian's Friend*, she harnessed the tremendous evangelical passion and philanthropic potential embodied in white women's late-nineteenth-century commitments to maternalism. The rise and fall of this movement within the ranks of WNIA and the federal Indian Service is well documented, as is its particularistic expression in 1890s California. Despite occasionally unflattering portraits of WNIA's longtime leader, there is no denying Quinton's force. She expertly leveraged the organization's collective energy and her own prominence within the movement to draw government funding and donations by the barrelful to the modest doorsteps of this rural California outpost.<sup>12</sup> The latter came most consistently from the Philadelphia, Jamaica Plain (Boston), and New Orleans chapters. After 1894 support also flowed from a new chapter, the San José Indian Association (SJIA), but the entire WNIA network followed Greenville through decade-long incremental growth and setback, construction and fire, and mission day to government boarding school transition. Long after Quinton negotiated its government sale and transfer, WNIA affiliates were encouraged

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to remember “our old love Greenville” at Christmas, when teachers needed help with presents for children and parents.<sup>13</sup>

The school drew federal support from the start, as Quinton was able to convince the Office of Indian Affairs (OIA) to pay Hall’s salary as MIS’s first teacher. He resigned a year later to move out of state, and in October 1891 Edward N. Ament replaced him. Seven students met in the one-room building the WNIA had paid Hall and several Native fathers to build in 1890. Holding his post for a decade, Ament indelibly shaped the school, local perceptions of it by Native and non-Native communities, and its reputation among reformers from San Jose to Washington, D.C.<sup>14</sup> Edward and his wife, Florence “Floy” Ament, were earnest Christians, believing righteously in their own benevolence. A graduate of Oakland’s Heald Business College, Ament regularly solicited donations of clothing and funds for school supplies in Plumas County and San Jose, where SJIA provided vigorous support.<sup>15</sup>

In 1892, when Floy was hired as assistant teacher and school matron, MIS boasted twenty pupils. Addressing the Plumas County Teachers Institute, Ament claimed that his students took quickly to writing and drawing but found arithmetic challenging. He bemoaned his lack of patience, as teaching Native students required this virtue in abundance: “Many of them live in smoke-begrimed campoodies, and subsist on acorns and fish, with now and then a week or so of more civilized food. And yet we expect them to come into school looking clean and fresh; we expect well-learned lessons from pupils who have breakfasted on acorn flakes, pick up raw acorns at noon, and will go home to acorn soup at night. This food, we must admit, is not a great brain stimulant at best.”<sup>16</sup> On some points, Ament was flatly incorrect. Acorn is a valuable source of nutrition.<sup>17</sup> On others, he was strikingly clear-minded—at least in part: “Indians are naturally superstitious and loth to step outside of old customs and traditions, and thus *many of the older ones are convinced that education is only another means of wiping them off the face of the earth.*”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many were unwilling to send their children to Greenville. Others were anxious to do so regardless of ideological and material hurdles.

Ament hewed a rigid Christian line. One of the many townspeople he invited to tour the day school in its early years was Methodist Episcopal preacher S. W. Albone. Although he was duly impressed, what really captured his attention was learning how Ament handled the sudden and nearby appearance of a *k’um*, or “sweat house, a work of the past, [where] the Indians go on Sunday evening to dance and drink.” Heading over on first notice, Ament and his brother William lectured them about the ills of dancing and drinking and “sang to them.”<sup>19</sup> This

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anecdote is enlightening. First, it demonstrates that some parents were willing to forgo ceremonial expression—or suppress public knowledge of its continued vitality—to keep their children in school; this was common practice for many Indigenous peoples under colonial regimes. Maidu were no different. Second, what parents clearly sought for their offspring was educational advantage, and literacy above all, not Christian conversion.<sup>20</sup> Third, they were willing to move residence and ceremonial sites to get it.

### **Big Meadow Maidu Parents: MIS Transitions from Day to Boarding School**

In 1892 the fathers of ten Big Meadow Maidu children traveled to Indian Valley, hoping to find nearby employment so they could enroll their children at MIS, still just a day school.<sup>21</sup> This impulse was not without precedent or design. On a summer 1891 California tour, Quinton had preached at Big Meadow, agitated for a Big Meadow Sunday school, and purportedly “induced some of the Indians to move over to Greenville in order to attend school.”<sup>22</sup> Unlike fathers who moved to Greenville in 1891, those who went in spring 1892 did not find jobs and returned home frustrated. Even during milder months, when wagon roads were passable, daily round-trips of thirty miles from Big Meadow to Greenville and back again were prohibitive. Certain that lack of schooling would disadvantage their children, the fathers met with public school superintendent Benjamin R. Foss in May to lobby for a school. He reported a planned follow-up meeting and the Maidu desire that white people attend and “assist them in securing the school.”<sup>23</sup> A tally of forty school-age Big Meadow Maidu seemed to bode well, but support never materialized, despite WNIA’s own optimistic projections in July 1892: “This [Quinton’s 1891 trip] has led to the great increase in the desire for help at Big Meadows. Some bright young ladies, the Misses Abbott and others will no doubt help in the new enterprise in their own town.” While the *Indian’s Friend* was making this announcement to its national readership, local residents were learning official state requirements for public school access: “Indians who have given up their tribal relations” were entitled to public education for their children; those maintaining tribal relations could expect their children to be lawfully excluded.<sup>24</sup>

This news galvanized Quinton, who pressed Commissioner of Indian Affairs Thomas Morgan for help in developing boarding facilities. She and Ament had already cited hunger, poverty, and three-mile treks through snow by Indian Valley pupils as incentives for boarding school status. The effort of Big Meadow fathers to get their children schooling punctuated these points. WNIA offered to build the structure if OIA would contract for student room and board. Slowly, the federal

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system's massive cogs began to grind. By fall 1894, thirty-six of Greenville's eighty students were boarding. Quinton then decided the government should cover day pupil lunches. Why should they eat a "cold potato" from home while their boarding peers dined on more substantial fare?<sup>25</sup> Morgan conceded.

Quinton's sale of MIS to the government two years later came with high Native costs. In Greenville's early day and boarding iterations, pupils were there because parents made the difficult choice to send them. Education was not only or always a motivating factor. Some parents sought for their children greater food security, warmth during winter months, and daily supervision when they were called away to work or lost the family members who typically cared for them. They gambled on Greenville providing such things. Regardless of limited options or knowledge of the school's ideological endgame, parents still held the balance of power. This small degree of autonomy was lost under federal administration; the school superintendent was now compelled to follow federal policy, including an 1891 compulsory attendance law. As with all else in these perilous times, Native parents could not predict the future. But for Big Meadow Maidu who had lived through *Thompson v. Doaksum*, knowing their children could compete in a world dominated by the written word must have been paramount.

### **Arrival, Escape, and "Rescue"**

Marie's carefree life with Hukespem and Mariah wound to an abrupt close in June 1900. In February, OIA budgeted \$150 for student recruitment and transportation; the government wanted beds filled. The Aments often found the commissioner's expectations tedious and absurd, but they were dedicated to the school's Christian mission, and on occasion these aligned with his demands. For a decade, Floy had ministered to the sick, checked on elderly Maidu, and distributed medicine, clothing, and toys sent by the barrelful from WNIA affiliates. She was a familiar presence in Big Meadow, where between late spring and early summer, she made three trips to visit camps and collect students. Recent acquisition of a covered wagon made these excursions decidedly more comfortable and efficient.<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps Marie was more curious than scared on the road to Greenville, but this quickly changed. Boarding pupils were bathed upon entry—and in some schools subjected to haircuts and destruction of tribal clothing. She was not going to escape this ritual. Marie surveyed her strange surroundings while Floy stripped her down. Spotting a tub of steamy water, she was terrified to find herself suddenly inhabiting it. Unable to speak or understand English, she drew on experience. Knowing that Mariah used big tubs to cook acorn mush, Marie ascertained that

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she had been plucked of her clothes for this same purpose! Bolting out of the tub and door, she sprinted naked and frightened into the countryside, as far as her little legs would carry her—two miles or more, she recalled. Woefully, her escape was thwarted when an older pupil caught up to her on a bicycle. For the next twelve years, minus a few summer weeks here and there and two years in public school, Greenville was home, not because she boarded there for so long that she forgot her grandparents' camp or her mother's existence but rather because it became an important site of family practice and belonging. The pupil who came after her was her fourteen-year-old cousin Eli Piazzoni, the eldest Greenville pupil in the Bill lineage. Marie was the youngest. In fact, at age four, she was the youngest student in the entire school. In between fell multiple siblings and cousins. Half siblings John and Lizzette Mason were eight and six. John Piazzoni was twelve, Amy (also known as Emma) was ten, Rose was six, and Alice was five. The youngest Piazzoni, Pauline, was home, an infant of not quite one. Older cousins had come and gone. Hukespem's grandchildren were among Greenville's earliest boarders. For instance, grandson Tommy Tucker, Flora Bill Dick's son, was boarding by 1896, as were granddaughters Tina and Anna, as well as step-grandson Rueben (or Rube), Charley Gould's children. Eli and John Piazzoni arrived not long after, excelling academically.<sup>27</sup>

Eli's "rescue" of Marie was simultaneously an act of betrayal and an expression of love, a poignant testament to the condition of being colonized as a people and determined to exercise the protective ties of family and kinship that boarding schools sought to undermine. Bundling up his naked little cousin in his shirt, he pedaled back to Floy and the waiting bath, assuring Marie in their shared Maidu language that she was not going to be cooked alive. Ament believed in saving the souls, washing the bodies, and transforming the domiciles of his students. "The first and most essential lessons are those of economy and cleanliness," he argued, "and it is really surprising to see how soon they learn to have a care for their clothing. We hear such remarks as 'I can't "bear" now; I've got on new pants.' 'Tommy Tucker, hand up your hat.' 'Johnnie Jim's got a hole in his shoe.' 'Cornea Washoe, how did you broke your dress?'"<sup>28</sup> Ament was expert at soliciting donations of shoes and clothing.<sup>29</sup> Speaking here to a generous San Jose audience, he continued, "Expressions like these would not be noticed from white children, but from Indian children it notes a decided advancement."

Ament's discourse on girls' physical appearance tells us how he and Floy perceived children like Marie upon arrival: "When the girls first come they are queer looking objects indeed; their hair which is stiff and uncompromising, is

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allowed to fall forward from the crown and is cut off, just covering the eye-brow, while the side and back locks hang unconfined over and in front of the ears. Sometimes it is quite long, but generally it is ‘bobbed’ straight around the neck. One’s first impression is their heads must be square; but how soon all this is changed!”<sup>30</sup> Just as he had drawn upon his pupils’ own words to demonstrate their acquisition of appropriate regard for their clothing, he turned to student conversation about new hair grooming practices: “Where’s that curling irons? Roxy wants to curl Otie’s hair.” “I don’t know. I don’t see that curl irons today. I think Nellie got it.”<sup>31</sup> New clothing and hairstyles were only part of Greenville girls’ transformation, as this image of young Marie shows.<sup>32</sup>

Ament deployed his pupils’ names and words to great effect in his public recitations. It is not by happenstance that he retains their grammatical imperfections. It is strategy. This was, to bend one scholar’s turn of the phrase, “how a [boarding school] Indian should sound.”<sup>33</sup> Their partial fluency or “broken



**Figure 2.** Greenville School girls, circa 1905. Marie leans forward on the far lower left, a wide grin across her face. Alice Piazzoni is fifth from the left. Behind her, with a pin on her lapel, is Marie’s friend Ellen Reeves.

*Trubody Collection, Plumas County Museum, Quincy, California.*

English” reinforced his audience’s stereotypic expectations and bolstered the importance of boarding as an assimilative mechanism. Boarding facilities, Ament argued, forced immersion in English language and American traditions. By contrast, a day school format provided only four hours of exposure, after which pupils returned home to Native tongues and ways.<sup>34</sup> His efforts paid off, setting the stage for expansion.

School facilities were small and primitive between 1894 and 1896, when Marie’s cousins and siblings began boarding, but she arrived to a government-funded building celebrated as the county’s most modern structure. The first floor housed the superintendent’s office, girls’ and boys’ dormitories, a dedicated and plumbed kitchen, plumbed washrooms, and a spacious dining and social commons. The second story included housing quarters for the superintendent’s family and other employees. Several outbuildings served storage and industrial needs. The wide porch was a favorite gathering place for socializing and formal photographs.<sup>35</sup>

Marie was assigned the surname Mason and spent her initial year learning English.<sup>36</sup> Though a kindergarten had been added the year before, her formal



**Figure 3.** Greenville School girls, circa 1911. Marie is on the far left, back row. Assistant Matron Selina Twoguns is at the far left, front row.

*Trubody Collection, Plumas County Museum, Quincy, California.*

schooling did not begin until fall 1901.<sup>37</sup> Siblings and cousins eased the trauma of dislocation. Tribal tongues were discouraged by staff, and occasionally fellow students joined the refrain to speak only English. Having kin with whom to speak Maidu, however clandestinely, helped make comprehensible an unstable and otherwise inexplicable social landscape. The Aments' sudden departure, an interim superintendent's arrival in November, quarantining of pupils with chicken pox, vaccination of children and staff, and the arrival of Superintendent Charles Shell all occurred within six months of her arrival.<sup>38</sup> A quick study in English, Marie quickly charmed Greenville's seamstress, Emma Trubody. In a letter thanking WNIA for Christmas donations, Trubody explained that she and the kindergarten teacher, Miss Pope, had spent their evenings leading up to the holiday sewing clothes for fourteen dolls purchased with funds from the Jamaica Plain Indian Association. They had also made thirty-six sewing bags filled with scraps of lace, silk, velvet, and assorted notions—needles, thimbles, ribbons, buttons, spools of thread, and the like—sent by the New Orleans Indian Association, “so every girl from Alice to Marie—who has barely learned to say and is always saying ‘Please Mish Tubody I want needle,’ and when asked what for ‘to sew doll,’ received a sewing bag, and all but four of the older girls received dolls.”<sup>39</sup> Floy's evening fancywork classes started the summer Marie arrived. Little girls met on Tuesday and older ones on Saturday. Trubody took over after Floy departed. Marie was clearly anxious to join her cousin Alice in these classes.<sup>40</sup>

### **Realms of Play: Mountain Maidu Cultural Persistence**

Marie and her peers fascinated the daughter of Augustus (Gus) R. and Clara Bidwell, who split their time between Oakland and their Plumas County property. From the late 1890s through the early 1900s, Elsie and her younger brother Bruce frequented the school because their father had been appointed to supervise its expansion and modernization.<sup>41</sup> Five years older than Marie, Elsie was an avid reader of the *San Francisco Chronicle* children's page, to which she submitted mis-sives detailing life in Big Meadow and surrounds. In May 1902, a *Chronicle* editor remarked, “Here is another interesting little contribution to our native races, who are, alas, fast becoming civilized almost beyond recognition”: “GREENVILLE—It seems so good to see spring again. The fruit blossoms are out and the hills are covered with flowers. Pretty soon the picnic time will come. We will have lots of fun then. The Indian girls here have such ‘high-styled’ names. Here are a few: Agnes, Jessie, Rosie, Bessie, Amy, Mildred, Belle, Kate, Hazel, Christine, Edna,

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Alice, Stella, Sadie, Ada, Pearl, Ines, Lillie, Ethel, Ivy, Martha, Marie, Augusta, Mable. Your constant reader, ELSIE BIDWELL.” A summer resident of Big Meadow, Elsie had greater familiarity with pupils there, which is apparent in the high percentage she names: Marie, three Piazzoni sisters, several Peconum and Rogers girls. She was not alone in anticipating picnic season. Each May the school hosted a community-wide Decoration Day picnic, bringing local residents, parents, pupils, and teachers together in a convivial environment. But what really captivated Elsie were Maidu girls’ private realms of play:

When we first came to the mountains we lived in the woods near a large Indian boarding school. The little girls played around the trees in groups of five or six. They sat on the ground in a circle with a great deal of laughing and jabbering in Indian. We wondered what they were playing. One day, as my brother and I were gathering flowers, we came upon a doll’s playhouse made of irregular scraps of boards and brick, gathered from a house that was being built near there. There were bits of bark, broken pieces of china and old tin cans for furniture and it looked so cunning that we thought we would like to surprise the little Indian girls by putting in something from our own dollhouse. So when the girls were away we put in some little Japanese dolls. For a few days they stayed there, and I suppose the Indians play with them. But one day we peeked in and saw their clothes were taken off and put on the stick dolls. I don’t know what became of the dolls themselves. The stick dolls were little sticks with bits of calico wound around them. They were all rather small. Some of the girls had bisque dolls given them by friends, but they never played with them out of doors and they made stick dolls for every playhouse.<sup>42</sup>

Decades later, she expanded on this portrait, recalling material evidence of inventive play found “among the rocks and trees, on the hillsides adjacent to the school grounds.” Maidu girls were willing participants in school games like croquet, but these did not replace their own imaginative pursuits, such as fabricating miniature Maidu camps. “Some were regular ‘campoodies,’ and in them were odds and ends of broken glass and china . . . pictures cut from catalogues, and most interesting of all, evidences of their own ingenuity, such as tiny baskets and dolls papoose cases, chains and furniture made from bark and stones.”<sup>43</sup>

Marie later recalled Bidwell’s school visits: “We played together and tried to teach the daughter how to speak our Indian language.”<sup>44</sup> Indigenous pupils and parents retained, integrated, and taught instructors about their own traditions.



**Figure 4.** Greenville School students and teachers at a Decoration Day picnic, circa 1903. *Circled, from left to right: Marie's sister Lizzette, cousin Alice Piazzoni, and friend Edith Peconum. Teacher Emma Trubody stands behind the children, wearing a wide-brimmed hat.*

*Dorothy M. Hill Collection, Meriam Library Special Collections, California State University–Chico.*

For instance, under syncretic cover of the school's 1895 Decoration Day picnic, and surely others as well, Maidu practiced components of their Spring Ceremony, or Bear Dance, when "they made a flying rush to the river, throwing into the swift current grass and flowers, signifying a casting away of 'hatred, malice, hatred and all charitableness' for the year."<sup>45</sup> The chains Elsie observed in their playhouses, adaptations of traditional weaving to acculturative forms and price points, attest to the school's grounding in Indigenous place. "There are probably yards and yards of them still in Greenville homes," Bidwell wrote.<sup>46</sup> Pupils made them in summertime, collecting and peeling new fir shoots. They were shaped into interlocking links while green and malleable, and the going price was five to twenty-five cents per yard, depending upon the size of links, which typically ranged from a quarter inch to an inch.<sup>47</sup> Baskets, by comparison, were a highly regarded and expensive art form, traded and sold locally by Native women, collected by tourists and museums, and featured for sale by WNIA's Industrial Department in the association's monthly periodical, the *Indian's Friend*. California "work baskets, card trays, and decorative pieces," which sold for between

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seventy-five cents and one hundred dollars, were advertised with the tagline “The finest baskets in the world come from our Pacific Coast.”<sup>48</sup> In her 1901 “Course of Study for Indians Schools,” superintendent of Indian education Estelle Reel asked reservation agents to send the finest basket specimens and their weavers’ names, so they could arrange to hire them as teachers, since the art must be “revived by children of the present generation.” She urged its teaching as a component of historical instruction, encouraging teachers to exhibit student work in classrooms to stimulate competition and to remind them that the more “Indian a basket is, the higher price it will bring.”<sup>49</sup>

Greenville was ahead of this curve. In 1895 SJIA donated money to hire an “Indian woman living near the Greenville school to give the girls in the school a lesson once a week in basket making. This woman is industrious and capable and makes especially fine baskets.”<sup>50</sup> Identified as a pupil’s mother, she had an ally in Floy, who recommended her and insisted she be paid for her work, confiding to WNIA that she was clean and her baskets “very pretty.”<sup>51</sup> The girls’ handiwork was sold through the association’s Industrial Department to support missionary work, including the cost of shipping donations of clothing and supplies to Greenville. WNIA cleverly tapped into a thriving market for Native crafts of every type, from moccasins to beadwork and basketry. Industrialism’s social ills fostered antimodernist sentiment. Rebellion, among the middle and upper classes, found robust expression in the arts and crafts movement, where white women wove “Indian” hobby baskets as an antidote to the psychosocial pathos of the very same modernity to which they were righteously forcing Native peoples to assimilate. Catalogs supplied patterns, materials, and instructions, but Native-made basketry was prized as the embodiment of authentic life. World fairs displayed Indigenous art and artists, including basket weavers. When a “model” Indian boarding school was proposed for the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition, social reformers were jubilant. Vehemently opposed to Wild West shows and midway displays that hyped stereotypical imagery of Native people as savage and violent, they wanted to show off the human products of their reformer labor. However, as one scholar observed, when “Show-Indian students replaced Show Indians,” the public failed to demonstrate enthusiasm.<sup>52</sup> Book learning, blacksmithing, crocheted collars, and other fancywork bored romantic sensibilities and accosted an eastern imaginary animated by “authentic” objects and pursuits linked to “frontier” states.<sup>53</sup>

Despite WNIA’s early promotion of basket weaving, in 1910 Greenville’s Superintendent Frank Mann bemoaned its decline and the passing of expert practitioners. Young women were not interested in keeping it afloat, he lamented,

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seemingly oblivious to the role boarding schools played in destroying the fabric of family and socioeconomic tradition that ensured its respect and reproduction. Yet the very next year, Marie was enrolled in a basketry course, building upon skills and knowledge Mariah and Josie had already begun imparting.<sup>54</sup> The traditional stick dolls and miniature “campoodies” Bidwell stumbled upon are vivid reminders that Maidu women had been successfully cultivating “domestic arts” and “maternal” values in their daughters for centuries, reproducing their culture without Christian or American intervention. Yet the driving premise of WNIA and the federal boarding school system was that Native people, women in particular, must be taught to cook, keep house, clothe, and mother children. Intent on reorienting Native people toward the nuclear family, reformers encouraged husbands to exercise patriarchal authority over wives and children, and wives to maintain “proper” Christian domiciles. The “womanly arts” were enshrined as the foundation for producing Americanized families and households, where fathers and sons tilled their allotment’s soil while mothers and daughters labored happily—and only—in the domestic sphere. As one scholar affirms in her study of federal “fathers and mothers,” Indian Service employees were expected to model these gendered dimensions of domestic married life.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the Aments and their successors promulgated this ideology in the classroom, the countryside, and the church. For nine years Ament preached on Sunday mornings and taught afternoon Sunday school. Upward of sixty parents and students regularly congregated to hear him extoll Christian monogamous marriage over customary or polygynous counterparts. Committed to Christian lives and domiciles, Floy diligently penetrated the outlying countryside, visiting Native camps. In no time, her correspondence reproduced the discursive imagery of Native families and homes that peppered the *Indian’s Friend*, where her WNIA peers regularly vented their horror over “dirty” and “primitive” conditions from which they self-righteously removed children.<sup>56</sup>

### **A Settler Colonial Curriculum: Learning to Read, Write, and Labor**

Sunday sermons and field visits to Native homes were important, but children’s schooling was the gravitational center of assimilation. Academic instruction included reading, writing, geography, and arithmetic. This comprised about five hours of classroom work, split between morning and afternoon sessions. Industrial training and recreation filled the remainder of the day. While boys learned to shoe horses, repair wagons, and farm, girls trained in domestic arts. Simple sewing, which Marie was so anxious to begin, progressed to embroidery,

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crochet, and fancywork. Upper-grade girls learned pattern making and dressmaking, and machine sewing, helping to produce school uniforms.<sup>57</sup> They trained in cooking, setting a proper dining table, washing and ironing, singing, and playing musical instruments. The year Marie was born, Ament solicited help in buying an organ. Generosity from WNIA affiliates enabled the purchase of two, one for the dormitory and the other for instruction and chapel services in the main building.<sup>58</sup> Physical grace was cultivated through dance and synchronized hoop drills that young girls often performed for visitors.<sup>59</sup>

Biographical studies of boarding school alumnae over the last quarter century show how rarely Native women could afford the luxury of laboring solely in their own homes. Instead, these lessons in domesticity prepared female students to labor in white homes.<sup>60</sup> Marie can be counted among them, but neither Greenville nor her experience is so easily encapsulated. Some scholars argue that boarding schools were designed to produce an underclass in permanent servitude to settler colonial society; others highlight gaps between reformer intent, federal policy mandates, and onsite administration, noting that variegation in the latter produced distinctive patterns of assimilationist practice *and* resistance to it. This uneven grain existed not only between institutions but over the lifetime of individual schools. Scholarly calls to transcend generalizations about boarding schools and alumni are not denials of profound suffering, death, and intergenerational trauma. They are challenges to discern distinctions; to acknowledge variations in personnel, in community reception, and in student response. They are calls to identify individual and collective modes of survival, resistance, and persistence.<sup>61</sup> Close mining of oral and archival records shows that despite Greenville's active and inherent denigration of Native peoples and domiciles, parents and children occasionally deflected its corrosive potential, navigating its presence *as* families and its possibilities *for* family.

### **The Subversive Bonds of Mountain Maidu Kinship**

Unlike most off-reservation boarding schools that drew rural students into distant and alien urban settings, Greenville drew students from the nearby countryside in its early years.<sup>62</sup> This allowed parents to vest it with alternative potential. John Kinney, recently widowed and without means to care for his young daughters, Maude and Katie, saw the school as a safe haven while he was living and working on a nearby Indian Valley ranch, but he spent every Sunday at school visiting his girls. The Aments made much of this and the deep affection they demonstrated for one another. As Christians, and beneficiaries of WNIA's missionary patronage,

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they reported how touching it was to witness six-year-old Katie kiss her daddy good-bye and offer an evening prayer that Jesus make her papa “a good man” and her a “good little girl.” Indeed, this is a stirring anecdote, but not because it evinces Christian conversion. Rather it reminds us that parents made tremendous sacrifices in these rapidly changing times. Two years after the *Indian’s Friend* recounted Katie’s prayerful wish in the May 1895 edition, John Kinney withdrew both daughters; little Maude died eight months later.

Schoolchildren missed and longed for their siblings and cousins back home no less than they longed for their parents, and vice versa. Some Greenville pupils found ways to bridge that distance. This happened in spring 1895 when a father arrived from Big Meadow with a basket of fresh mountain trout. At the close of the visit, his three daughters deposited in the basket treasures for their little brother and sisters. Wanting to be sure this was permissible, the father showed Ament these contents: “There were a few little toy dishes, three or four marbles, a doll, and a handful of little dried figs I had given them the day before.”<sup>63</sup> This display of love and generosity was not unusual. Five-year-old Rosie Piazzoni, “at the lead of her class of six or seven,” was similarly inclined and clever when deciding that her little sister Alice, back in Big Meadow, should have a string of blue beads just like the one she had just earned for finishing her first reader. Tucking this prized possession away, she approached her teacher with a different book, explaining that she planned to read it and earn a second strand of beads, as the others were for her sister.<sup>64</sup> These gestures toward absent siblings speak volumes. Separating siblings was no less cruel than separating parents and children.

Marie’s siblings and Piazzoni cousins were anxious to welcome her. Once the Aments learned she was below OIA’s five-year-old admission threshold, she was allowed to stay only because they intervened with pleas and assurances that she was “smart” and capable of schoolwork.<sup>65</sup> Six months after Marie’s arrival, the couple resigned.<sup>66</sup> They had grown the school’s capacity beyond their own limits, working seven days a week. In early years, a two-month break helped them recharge, but this ended under federal administration. Students were expected to remain on-site for years at a time. Ament challenged this policy, explaining somewhat insubordinately that he would be hard pressed to keep parents and children apart given the school’s proximity to their homes. He was correct; parents continued to ask for their children to be sent home for vacation, and some older pupils went on their own dime.<sup>67</sup> Break or no break, students missed their youthful kin cohorts. When younger family members joined them at school, they gained some comforts of home. They could celebrate birthdays, Decoration Day picnics,

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and Christmases together. More importantly, they could make daily mischief and memories, tease and look out for one another, safely “talk Indian,” and bask in the sense of security that family fostered.<sup>68</sup> As is demonstrated in a recent study of Scottish adoptee birth family reunions, it is this latter repository of everyday “unmarked” exchange that generates the profound and enduring bonds of kinship.<sup>69</sup> These social acts, marked and unmarked, also produced “fictive kin” at off-reservation boarding schools, generating vast cross-tribal networks of alumni, who reflect on these years and experiences with nostalgia that descendants find difficult to comprehend. During the first half of Greenville’s existence, despite efforts to detribalize and Christianize, families used the school strategically. When new superintendents arrived, instituting curricula not in their children’s best interest, parents intervened when they judged it necessary. For instance, in 1906, when John Peconum learned that coeducational dancing was part of the exercise curriculum, he threatened to withdraw his daughters, demanding that Mountain Maidu tradition be observed. Unmarried men and women did not dance together.<sup>70</sup> The Peconum boys, watching out for their sisters, had relayed this development to their father.<sup>71</sup>

For almost a decade, the Bill cousins enjoyed a semblance of family life at Greenville, venturing home to Big Meadow for longer and shorter stays. Marie also boarded for long stints, but in May 1905 she left for a year, continuing her education in public school at Prattville. In June 1906 teacher Mabel Locey promoted her to fourth grade. She was back at Greenville in September but called home weeks later when her stepfather, Abe Lowery, became ill.<sup>72</sup> He died in January or February of 1907. Finishing out the school year in Prattville, Marie returned to Greenville that fall, but not before another family crisis ensued.

In August, Marie’s brother was involved in a fatal altercation with a Maidu man and family friend.<sup>73</sup> Although the act was later ruled self-defense, John Mason fired the bullet that eventually killed thirty-year-old Billy Lowery. Half Lowery’s age, John was jailed for a week, until the circuit judge arrived in Prattville to hear testimony. Witnesses confirmed that alcohol was to blame for the August 24 shooting at a Humbug Valley big time. Lowery apparently cracked his pistol butt on Mason’s head several times and verbally threatened the adolescent’s life. The local paper subjected Lowery to extensive character assassination and cavalierly pronounced both to be “bad Indians.”<sup>74</sup> Multiple news stories offered an unfiltered glimpse at the racist underbelly of a local community unable to apprehend its own role in this sad drama through the introduction of alcohol.<sup>75</sup> “It seems a rather difficult task to kill this notorious and dangerous half-breed,

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Billy Lowery,” the writer opined, when it seemed he might live. Two years earlier he survived a brutal stabbing in Quincy. When he finally succumbed, a near-celebratory headline proclaimed, “End of Billy Lowery,” and the article reported, “Billy Lowery, the half-breed Indian noted for the many troubles he has caused himself and others is dead.”<sup>76</sup>

A cascade of loss ensued. John “Bull” Mason was Marie’s eldest sibling. She must have been devastated by community condemnation of him as a “bad Indian,” but she was doubly stung when two months later, John and Lizzette left for Chemawa Indian School in Oregon.<sup>77</sup> “John Piazzoni arrived from California on Wednesday with his cousins John and Lizette Mason,” proclaimed the November 29, 1907, *Chemawa American*. Piazzoni had been transferred there in 1903, along with several other aged-out Greenville students.<sup>78</sup> His cousin’s presence and his own athletic prowess helped ease Mason’s transition to Chemawa. He played a season of football, ran track, and won the April 1909 Salem–Portland relay race. Academic hurdles were another matter. Despite years of Greenville schooling, he tested into second grade.<sup>79</sup> This does not mean his classmates were small children; young adults populated elementary grade levels across the boarding school system.<sup>80</sup> Striving to close this gap, Mason passed his third-grade exams in June 1908 and joined the Reliance Literary Society the next fall. With other Greenville alumni, Joaquin Meadows, Frank Mose, and John Peazzoni (as he spelled his name in adulthood), Mason excelled in his woodcraft and industrial training classes.<sup>81</sup> Two years younger, Lizzette took her sixth-grade examination at the end of her first year and, with her future sister-in-law Rhoda Silverthorne, was active in YWCA leadership.

Meanwhile, twelve-year-old Marie, bereft of her siblings’ companionship, completed fourth grade. Her fifth-grade year (1908–1909) progressed as usual, but when school resumed in September 1909, Marie was not there.<sup>82</sup> Hukespem had died. Although the mission school now belonged to the federal government, Quinton and WNIA kept a missionary in the field. In 1906 and 1907, he documented crushing need among elderly Maidu, including Mariah and Big Meadow Bill. In late November 1908, the county board of supervisors approved \$7.50 per month to be drawn, on Marie’s grandparent’s behalf, from the county’s hospital fund. The Reverend John Johnson of WNIA was assigned to purchase supplies from a designated Greenville merchant and personally deliver them.<sup>83</sup> Hukespem died just weeks after this round of aid expired. Perhaps it eased his final days.

Marie returned to begin sixth-grade studies on October 29, 1909. That summer, 1910 census takers enumerated Mariah in Indian Valley Township, domiciled

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with her daughter and son-in-law Susie (Bill) and Thomas Buckley and their fifteen-year-old granddaughter Elsie, Marie's cousin.<sup>84</sup> Just down the road were newlyweds Josie Bill and Johnny Roy and their eighteen-month-old daughter.<sup>85</sup> Like Josie, Johnny Roy was a Big Meadow Maidu employed at a nearby sawmill.<sup>86</sup> Josie had achieved a measure of stability in her personal life, but this intimate domestic sphere was not one into which fifteen-year-old Marie comfortably figured, tethering her more tightly to school as the principal site of home and belonging. This was doubly problematic. Seventh grade was Greenville's highest grade level. She was poised to age out the next year. She had seen this happen to her cousins and others. Some, like Roxie (Jake) Dexter, now school laundress, had nowhere to go. Marie had to be worried.

### **An Uncertain Future**

Marie finished sixth grade with resolve, despite her late start and the radically altered world around her. Her siblings and cousins were scattered far away, Josie had a new husband and baby daughter, her beloved Hukespem was dead, and Big Meadow was about to be inundated by a hydroelectric project, all heralding deep uncertainty. She was not the only person pondering her future.

In 1911 Superintendent Mann told the commissioner of Indian affairs that he worried about his pupils' limited futures and the white community's ambivalence toward the school. This problem had not existed under Ament's administration, but the near-constant rotation of superintendents under federal administration affected community relations. Racism was accelerating. Public schools were not taking their share of Native students, and many Native parents were not pursuing their children's enrollment to shield them from overt discrimination.<sup>87</sup> Mann tried resolving this tension by hosting events that brought the two groups together in settings that demonstrated his pupils' intelligence and achievement, but he was skeptical that this would alter their socioeconomic fortunes. A 1907 recommendation that students be trained to enter the dairy industry had fallen on deaf ears. Mann knew this rural setting posed limited opportunity. Old weavers produced "beautiful specimens," but the "laborious" nature of the art could not maintain the interest of young Maidu women trained in domestic arts, who earned fifteen to twenty dollars per month. Maidu young men made between \$1.50 and \$2.50 per day working as ranch hands, in summer resorts, for mine companies, and at sawmills. Requests for Maidu laborers came faster than Mann could fill them. Greenville now had agency status, and he was disappointed in the quality of the land allotments he oversaw. They were hit and miss in terms of enabling long-term

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agricultural versus short-lived timber production for those Maidu lucky enough to even receive one. Few men owned herds and ranching operations. Boys were lured permanently away from school by age fourteen with the promise of steady wages. Girls eventually followed as domestic laborers in white homes.<sup>88</sup> Marie knew intimately the routine life awaiting her after adolescence. She had to be pondering her life after Greenville.

Interviews with boarding school alumni show how ingenious students were when it came to outwitting matrons and disciplinarians whose overactive imaginations led to preemptive strikes on innocent forms of socializing.<sup>89</sup> At Greenville, the outlying woods where Marie and her friends had once played house with stick dolls were places to escape for adolescent flirtations and midnight snacks from nearby fields and orchards.<sup>90</sup> Marie and Hensley Potts, a Konkow student, were already romantically linked. Her good friend Ellen Reeves had recently married Walter Potts, Hensley's brother. Marie was not inspired to follow suit. Her attention was turned eastward, where Eli and his sisters had been drawn. At the end of her seventh-grade year, 1910–11, a new superintendent arrived. Willard Campbell, formerly of Pipestone School in Browning, Montana, had special sympathy for Marie's situation. An orphaned White Earth Chippewa student, Ada Curtis, had been living with his family the previous year and had accompanied them to Greenville. During the 1911–12 year, Campbell tutored Ada and Marie in eighth-grade work, and Marie informally earned her "keep" as a lower-grade teacher's assistant. By summer 1912, when Marie showed Ada around Big Meadow and Chester, these two were good friends.<sup>91</sup> When Greenville's laundress resigned in June, Curtis applied for this federal Indian Service position. They were friends with another young woman, Selina Twoguns (Seneca), who helped Marie imagine new possibilities.

### **Finding Female Role Models**

Twoguns perhaps recognized a bit of herself in Marie, because she began recruiting her to her alma mater almost immediately.<sup>92</sup> Twoguns had not intended to go into the Indian School Service. Graduating in spring 1910, she immediately enrolled in Carlisle's postgraduate business program, but initial course work inspired her to head out into the world. Taking the civil service exam, she quickly landed a position as Greenville's "small boy's matron," arriving in May 1911, just weeks before the school year's end.<sup>93</sup> Sitting down to complete the "Records of Graduates and Returned Students" that August, she was overcome with gratitude and nostalgia. Like many Carlisle alums, she believed her years there would forever

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be the crowning experience of her life. Her youthful devotion is preserved in her graceful longhand and fading sepia-toned ink. Designed to verify ongoing commitment to assimilationist ideals, gather evidence of “civilized” lives and housing, and generate testimonials worthy of school propaganda, the questionnaire closed with a final appeal: “Tell me anything else of interest connected with your life.” Twoguns confided,

One thing, I am trying my very best to paddle my own canoe assisted by the things taught me during the years I spent at Carlisle. I was not sent there to school, but I wanted to go myself and I am not, for a minute, sorry that I went. It has fitted me to earn my own living, not only that, but to earn it honestly. Now, may I take this opportunity to thank you and all your assistants for all they have done for me during my long stay at Carlisle, I’ll admit those days were my happiest although I am very much pleased with the West.<sup>94</sup>

“The West” still held romance in those early months. Before long, she felt trapped in this rural mountain setting, where reaching the closest train station was an ordeal.

Marie, Curtis, and Twoguns shared common experience as long-term boarding school students.<sup>95</sup> Any differences among them receded in the long shadow cast by their upbringing in educational milieus designed to promulgate assimilation.<sup>96</sup> As it turned out, Marie already knew about Carlisle, and not just because her cousin Eli and his sisters were there. Boarding school periodicals, especially the *Carlisle Arrow* and *Red Man*, circulated widely among feeder institutions, and the *Plumas National* had been extolling the virtues of the famous Indian school and its athletes for longer than Marie had been alive.<sup>97</sup> But Twoguns kept up the pressure, writing Carlisle superintendent Moses Friedman in February 1912 for a photo of her graduating class. She posed proudly in the front row, beside friend and fellow business student Sarah Hoxie, a Nomlaki from California’s Round Valley Reservation. Perhaps Marie’s cousins had already mentioned this Covelo student, but here was photographic proof that a California Indian woman had gone east to Carlisle, graduated, and returned to work in the Indian Service.<sup>98</sup>

Nearing seventeen years old, Marie was more or less on her own. She longed to see the wider world, not simply through books or newspapers or graduation portraits but for herself. Intellectual curiosity fueled her ambition and imagination at least as much as Carlisle propaganda and family ties. Greenville was remote and in these years drew most students from the regional population, but Indian

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Service employees from far and wide cycled in and out, exposing pupils to life beyond the northern Sierra. By her very presence, Twoguns embodied possibilities that Marie could now imagine for herself. Curtis's predecessor, Lottie George, a twenty-five-year-old Shoshone from Idaho and a Haskell Indian School graduate, had done this as well. Marie was already leaning toward adventure when Twoguns again wrote Friedman:

Marie Mason is one I am very anxious to have the chance of getting all that Carlisle gives its students. She is an all around good girl and exceptionally bright in every thing she undertakes. Very ambitious and on her own accord she has been working since our school closed, had a place engaged long before she went for her vacation. She has learned all that this school can give its pupils in all lines. I would like to take her with me to Carlisle when I go, also Ada Curtis, another nice girl. . . . I think Mr. Campbell will write you concerning the girls.<sup>99</sup>

The "place" Marie had secured entailed working at a Chinese restaurant in Susanville. She waited tables by day and tutored a Chinese student, likely the restaurant owner's child, in the evening. Marie's cousin Tommy Tucker walked her home from work at night to guarantee her safe arrival; she was probably boarding at his Susanville home. Tucker's mother, Flora, and his stepfather, Billy Dick, were deceased, so he was living with his grandfather Hukespem's younger sister's daughter, Emma, and her husband, Cap DeHaven.<sup>100</sup>

Less than sanguine in his response, Friedman worried that his travel budget might not accommodate California fares.<sup>101</sup> Greenville superintendent Campbell, carrying on his own correspondence, had yet to learn this. In mid-August he told Friedman that he had two or three prospective Carlisle students in mind; applications would be forthcoming. Ada Curtis was "a splendid girl in every respect and wants especially to take up and perfect herself in sewing, dress-making, etc." In reference to Marie, he declared, "We have another girl, a Digger half-blood, who has finished the seventh grade at this school and I want her to go to Carlisle also. She is very bright and an excellent girl in every respect. . . . [I]n regard to transportation, you had better place immediately to my order at Keddie, California, on the Western Pacific, as many tickets as may be needed. How about the incidental expenses, etc.? Should they take sub-vouchers for incidentals?" Campbell forwarded Marie's and Ada's applications on August 22. Having yet to receive a response from his earlier letter, he underscored, "These are both splendid girls, and if accepted, I am sure will be a credit to your school."<sup>102</sup>

Carlisle required a parental signature for applicants eighteen years and under. Campbell explained, “Marie Mason does not live with her mother, who has no jurisdiction over her and, consequently, she signed the application herself, which is alright. Ada Curtis’ parents are both dead and she has been living with us during the past year, but is anxious to get some more education and thinks Carlisle is the place to go.”<sup>103</sup> Turning back to the young woman he had only come to know in the last year, he wrote, “You will find Marie a bright girl and I trust you will let her take up the things she is best fitted for.”<sup>104</sup> After Friedman telegraphed in late August to say the girls would have to pay their own expenses, Curtis decided to stay on at Greenville until December to earn her train fare and other expenses.<sup>105</sup> Marie and Twoguns, on the other hand, bought their Western Pacific tickets within the week. They would board at Keddie, on Monday, September 9, and arrive in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, by week’s end.

### Forging Her Own Path

Big Meadow and Greenville could not have been further removed from Washington, D.C., yet federal policy and reformers worked their way into the most intimate corners of Mountain Maidu life. Native people adapted to Christian missions, ideologies, and institutions in the same way they had to settler invasion four decades earlier: making the most of new possibilities while retaining practices and beliefs that defined them as Maidu. While some families refused to send their children to day or boarding school, others decided the advantages outweighed the losses and risks. In the years preceding and for many years after her arrival, Marie had close family at Greenville. She sewed and played dolls, learned letters and geography, spoke Maidu, and built a fund of memories with them through both marked and unmarked kinship exchange. She remained tethered to Big Meadow and her grandparents, going to family allotments and camps on a regular basis. After her cousins’ and siblings’ California departures, her stepfather Abe Lowry’s death, Josie’s remarriage to Johnny Roy, the birth of a younger half sister, and Hukespem’s death, Marie’s daily connection to family was attenuated. Greenville superintendents and teachers, her “surrogate family,” were just as mobile and impermanent, with new ones rotating in and out every few years. Luckily, Superintendents Mann and Campbell recognized her exceptional personality and academic potential. Native and non-Native personnel saw it too. The fictive kin who animated Marie’s daily life in this home away from Big Meadow cultivated her sense of self-worth and encouraged her to continue her education. Coming of age in a world where post-boarding school life entailed

some combination of marriage, motherhood, and domestic servitude in white households, Marie looked around for new role models. She found them in her cousin Eli, who had graduated from Carlisle, and in young Native women like herself, who found employment in the Indian School Service. Determined to forge her own path, she took a daring leap.