

Linda Yamane, ed. *A Gathering of Voices: The Native Peoples of the Central California Coast*. *Santa Cruz County Historical Journal* , issue number five (2002).

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In a little park next to the Sports Arena in downtown San Jose, near the confluence of Los Gatos Creek with the Guadalupe River, there is a remarkable and hauntingly beautiful work of public art. In it the wistful reflections of long-dead Ohlone elders swirl as it were around representations in monumental granite of a finely wrought Ohlone basket, and of a broken Ohlone mortar such as was used to grind acorns into flour. "The Weaver's Gifts," conceived and executed by the Irish sculptor Alan Counihan, commemorates the all-but-vanished lifeways -- and the continuing presence among us -- of the "Ohlone" peoples, as speakers of a number of closely related Native American languages are known, early inhabitants of the San Francisco and Monterey Bay regions.

When Spanish soldiers and missionaries established themselves here over two centuries ago, the Ohlone were exposed to infectious diseases against which their bodies had no defenses, and subjected to cramped and regimented conditions in the mission settlements where many took refuge or were confined. These conditions exacerbated the threat of contagion, and further undermined the viability of their traditional way of life. But a good many Ohlone survived into the late 19th century, as working people in the Anglo-dominated successor settlements. Since then, massive immigration and a statewide population explosion have all but overwhelmed the descendents of Ohlone, Spanish/Mexican "Californio" and early Anglo settler alike. Yet still today, several hundred people in our region identify themselves as Ohlone, and carry on as best they can what can be remembered or recovered of the traditions of their ancestors.

During the past century, recovering the Ohlone heritage has also been the concern of several anthropologists and historians. Early records have been raked through; archeological sites have been sifted; elders have been asked to tell their stories and sing their songs for avid note-takers -- even, years ago, for a pioneering wax-cylinder sound recorder. Counihan's

extensive recent researches, & his interviews with native people of differing heritage, enabled him to gather into his work a rich harvest of tribal names, and of words for the plants, animals and other features of our natural environment.

Sadly, though the work of art was completed only last year and is featured on the website for the city's Guadalupe River Park (<http://www.grpg.org/PublicArt.html#Basket>), it is already looking neglected. No plaque names the piece or identifies the sculptor; vandals have had their way with its carefully polished stone surfaces; and a major highway project raises dust & ruckus a few yards away across the Guadalupe.

Artist, performer & scholar Linda Yamane, a descendant of the Rumsien Ohlone, has been a leader in the recovery and interpretation of Ohlone traditions – including basket-weaving, song, dance, and story-telling. She is the author of *Weaving a California Tradition: A Native American Basket Maker* (Minneapolis: Lerner, 1997), and the compiler and illustrator of two books of Ohlone stories culled from earlier oral history. She has now collaborated with the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and a host of contributors to perform a great service for those who would understand the full range of human experience in our beautiful corner of the world, as well as for those who are determined not to forget. *A Gathering of Voices: The Native Peoples of the Central California Coast* compiles a diverse and accessible collection of writings on Ohlone experience from ancient times to the present, complete with an index and annotated bibliography, in some two hundred and thirty handsomely designed and richly illustrated pages.

Especially notable are the contributions by and about, and in most cases the photographs, of a considerable number of living or only recently deceased native Central Coast women and men. Their brief stories, poems, memoirs, profiles, cultural notes and collective statements, scattered throughout the collection; are perhaps more abundant here than in any other work published to date. Yamane herself penned the lovely "Reburial Verses," as well as a note on early Ohlone baskets; Stephen Meadows, of Ohlone and pioneer descent, offers profiles in verse of three Ohlone elders. Well-known Ohlone spokesman Patrick Orozco tells the stories of his own family, and of the Pajaro Valley Ohlone Council, through the pen of Lois Robin.

Elder Alex Ramírez, with Beverly Ortiz, offers vivid and moving accounts of the lessons learned in his Ohlone childhood; Anne Marie Sayers, Lydia Bojorquez and some two dozen others, including several contemporary Ohlone basket weavers, speak briefly but eloquently about the importance of native traditions in their lives, and the current struggles of their people. “The Challenges of Interpretation” are explored in Yamane’s transcribed conversation with local historian Sandy Lydon.

Academic scholarship, especially that of anthropologists, is amply if somewhat miscellaneous represented. Linda Agren and David W. Heron introduce the pioneering ethnographic fieldwork of John Peabody Harrington and C. Hart Merriam. Charles R. Smith and Douglas J. Peterson provide detailed studies of practical interest to local residents, on “Ohlone Medicinal Uses of Plants and “How to Cook Acorns and Work with Tules.” Linguist William Shipley reconstructs a vocabulary of the Awáswas language, once spoken from Davenport to Rio del Mar. Richard S. Levy mines the Santa Cruz Mission records to name several hundred individual inhabitants of eighteen Awáswas villages in the late 18th century. The fascinating rock art at the Chitactac-Adams Heritage Park near Gilroy is examined in detail by Donna L. Gillette; and there is a careful review of prehispanic archeological findings in Scotts Valley by Robert Cartier and Victoria Bobo.

Gary S. Breschini and Trudy Haversat reconstruct the shadowy ethnohistory of the Essalen people of the Big Sur Coast. Randall Milliken contributes a comprehensive review of Monterey Bay Ohlone history in the Spanish contact and mission periods, though without reference to the work Robert Jackson and others who have examined the same early Spanish & Mexican records. Edward Castillo, Luiseño/Cahuilla historian from Southern California, assembles the three extended narratives by Lorenzo Asisara, long-time native resident of 19th-century Santa Cruz, here published in one place for the first time.

Writing with Linda Yamane, Jacquelin Jensen Kehl provides a useful account of the effects of statehood on California’s Indians, including texts of the 1850 “Indian Protection” Act and amendments of 1860, which were the culmination of a long and mostly unsuccessful effort by European-heritage intruders to transform the free Native peoples of coastal California into

docile laborers for a private land-holding elite. Santa Cruz historian Geoff Dunn provides a searing epilog to these early historical accounts in the tragic misadventures and early demise of two appealing young Ohlone men sacrificed in the 1880s to the ethnocentrism of the town's predominantly Yankee settlers.

Like "The Weaver's Gifts", in its engaging and eloquent manner, *A Gathering of Voices* reminds today's sojourners along the Central California Coast that human life has long been lived richly and in harmony with nature in these parts, and that it can be so lived forever, if only we will continue to insist that it must.