

NC 0007

...Your other basket with the horizontal zig-zags (and which is in our book in the Bishop Harvest Days photograph from 1916 on page 88) is an early example of the Field days era basketry. We have located only a few (perhaps a dozen) baskets from the period prior to 1922 with firm dates of collection or manufacture.

It is difficult to say with absolute certainty who wove your basket, since during the 1910-1920 era this basket style was developing so rapidly. However, a somewhat similar basket was collected in 1914 in Yosemite Valley by Homer E. Sargent.

Homer Sargent was an avid collector of American Indian basketry. In August of 1914 he purchased several baskets from the Yosemite Store. If you look in our book on page 84, the baskets in the photograph numbered 35, 6, and 10 were all purchased by him. At the time this photograph was taken (c. 1912) the store was owned by Nelson Salter; by the time Sargent purchased the baskets (1914) the store was sold to Thornton. Apparently, between the time of this photograph and Sargent's visit, the store had acquired additional baskets; hence two others made by Mrs. Murphy (and acquired by Sargent) do not appear in this photograph.

I enclose a photocopy of the catalog card for the basket which is similar in design style to yours, and which was purchased by Sargent. Sargent donated his collection to the Field Museum of Natural History, where the basket is today. It has been over a decade since I have seen this basket, but I suspect that the workmanship on it would be very much like that on your basket. The Mrs. Murphy listed as the maker would be Mrs. Louie (Emma) Murphy. If you look in our book on page 102, you will see a photograph of Mrs. Murphy, holding a basket whose design style is very much like yours, as well as the basket, which Mr. Sargent collected. Thus far, Martha Lee and I have not located another Mono Lake weaver who used this sort of horizontal zig-zag band design style.

Without having excellent photographs of all three baskets to compare, or better yet, the baskets themselves to compare with one another, it is impossible to say for certain that your basket is also by Emma Murphy. However, I would say that it is most likely that yours was woven by her.

Emma Murphy was an important and influential weaver here, at least to judge by the comments of Estella Falla, basket buyer at Nelson Salter's store in 1912 (see our book, page 84-85). Unfortunately, baskets by Mrs. Murphy have been difficult to locate. We have only one small, oval example in the Yosemite Museum collection, collected by Miss Falla. It has bat-like patterns worked in the fern root and redbud. You are most fortunate to have acquired a basket which was, most likely, made by this little known, but important, weaver...

Craig Bates, Curator of Ethnography
Yosemite National Park
August 1995

