

PETALUMA'S FIRST PIONEERS, THE COAST MIWOK NATIVE AMERICANS

There are several definitions of the word, "pioneer." Among the most prevalent is, "One who ventures into unknown or unclaimed territory to settle." If emphasis is given to the term, "unclaimed," then the Native Americans were truly the first and arguably the only "true" pioneers. Seeking a better, more abundant and comfortable life, the early first people braved the Bering Straits and traversed the coast of the Pacific Ocean either by foot or by boat.

A group of them, the Coast Miwok, settled in the area we know today as southern Sonoma and Marin Counties. These people established, among many others, a village they called Petaluma. This village was approximately three and one half miles northeast of the city currently referred to as Petaluma. As told by Greg Sarris, the Chairman of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, this village was abandoned after the 1838 smallpox epidemic. For a descendant's personal account of this village, please see Mr. Sarris' article, "The Last Woman From Petaluma," and for a more general discussion of the history of California's Native Americans, see Benjamin Madley's An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe. Both are located on the reading table in the center of the gallery.

Portraits of members of the Coast Miwok tribe are rare. We are fortunate to have a reprint of the Sonoma County Library's portrait of Maxima Antonia Ynitia and Maria Antonia Ynitia, seen here on your left. These women were members of a prominent Coast Miwok family which played a vital historic role in both the 18th and 19th centuries.