

## The Coast Miwok Native Americans, Petaluma's First "Pioneers"

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. The first people to populate the west coast of North America came from the east, braving the Bering Straits by foot and exploring the coast of the Pacific Ocean by boat. The Coast Miwok, who settled just north of San Francisco Bay in the area we know today as Marin and southern Sonoma counties, were descendants of these early people.

The Coast Miwok established many communities, and among them was the 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 once vibrant village was abandoned after the 1838 smallpox epidemic. For more information on the Coast Miwok's Petaluma village 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*.

Portraits of members of the Coast Miwok tribe are rare. We are fortunate to have this reprint of the Sonoma County Library's portrait of Maxima Antonia Ynitia and Maria Antonia Ynitia. These women were members of a prominent Coast Miwok family that played a vital historic role in both the 18th and 19th centuries. Click on the portrait for additional information. (PDF)



