



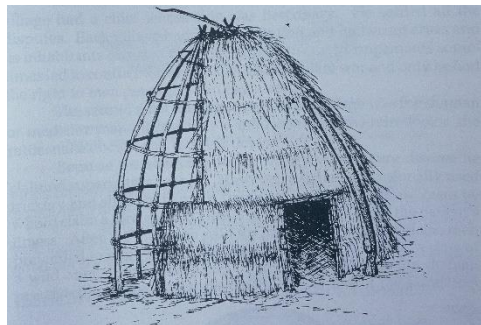
Located on the Lower Level of the Lafayette Library

LAFAYETTE'S FIRST INHABITANTS



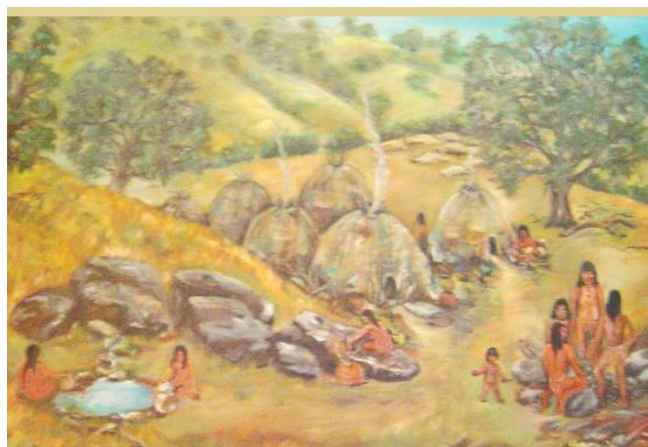
Thousands of years ago there were many groups of Native Americans living in what is today California. Those people living in the local area were the Saclan people. They were part of a larger Bay Miwok tribe that lived in central California. The Saclan were of average height with coarse black hair and brown eyes. Men and women often wore tattoos on their bodies that told of their families or lineage. Some tattoos were decorative, some were the symbol of the

image of the spirit meaning of an animal, bird or human being. Women and men wore their hair long, letting it grow throughout their life, although when someone in their tribe died, they would cut their hair as a sign of respect and mourning.

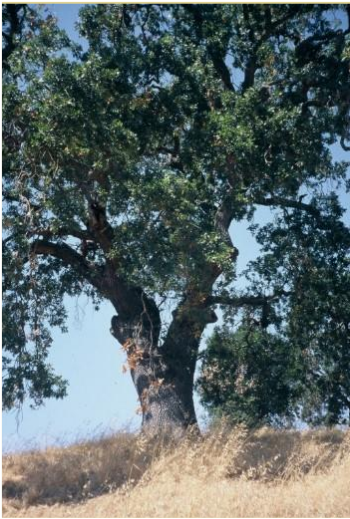


Saclan homes were tule grass huts constructed using willow branches and tule grass which grew in the creeks. Willow branches are very pliable and can bend without breaking. The willow branches were pushed into the ground and then attached using willow bark to form a frame. Tule

grasses from the creeks were layered over the frame to finish the home. Larger huts often could hold one or two families. Blankets of deer skin, bear skin, and woven rabbit skin lay around a central fire pit. Groups of huts were often built near large pieces of bedrock where acorns were crushed with pestles in the making of acorn mush. Local villages in our area were all situated near creeks so water was readily available. In villages of tribes of 50-100 persons, each family took care of its own needs, making its own bows and arrows, baskets and nets, and hunting animals for meat and fishing for salmon and other fish. These “triblets” had about 10 square miles of territory and each tribelet spoke a different language so nonverbal communication was often used.



In Saclan times, creeks were an important part of native life as they provided water for drinking, cooking and bathing. Fish such as salmon and steelhead, which were part of the native diet, were abundant in the creeks. Other animals came to the creeks for water so the Saclan were often able to capture them near the creeks.

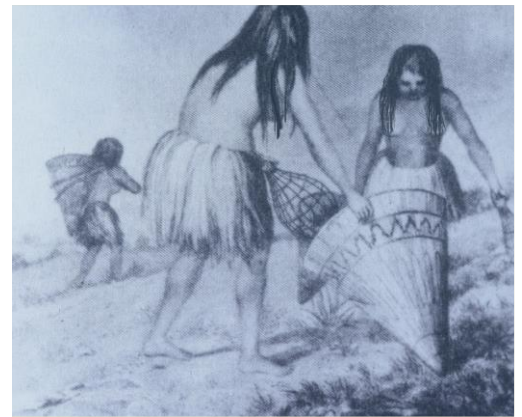


Indigenous plants to this area are trees like the oak, the buckeye, the willow and the bay laurel, and flowers such as poppies and lupine. Indigenous animals are foxes, racoons, deer, bobcats, grizzly bears, and coyotes, many of which still exist here today.

The Arroyo willow was a plant used by the Saclan in several ways: tea made from willow leaves was used to alleviate pain, the branches of the willow were used in the building of native huts, and bark from the willow branches was used to tie things together. Willow bark was also used to make skirts which women tied around their waists. Saclan women and men wore deer skin skirts or loin cloths. As the Saclan wore no shoes or sandals, their feet were hardened by a lifetime of walking barefoot. Necklaces made of shells and feathers were often worn by Saclan women.

In the winter, mud might be smeared on men's and women's bodies to keep them warm.

The Saclans also collected seeds that grew in the area. In the fall when the seeds were ripe, they would use woven paddles to knock the seeds into their baskets and then would roast the seeds in the fire before eating them. Buckeyes were another indigenous plant that grew in the area. These plants produced a nut that was covered with a thick skin. When the skin was removed and the nut dried out, it could be used to help the Saclan hunt for food. When fish were found in creeks, parts of the creek were blocked off so the fish could not escape. Then the Saclan would throw pieces of chopped soaproot bulbs or mashed buckeyes into the pool. A substance in the plants stunned the fish, which floated to the surface, unconscious but still completely edible.



Soaproot was another plant used by the Saclan. The root of the plant grows beneath the ground. When the leaves turn brown, the root can be pulled up and used as a food (if boiled) or as a soap to wash with. The tufts from the plant were used to make brushes. Flower stalks from deer grass or bunch grass were used to make baskets. Manzanita berries were used to make a cider that tasted like sour apples. The cider was used as a wash for poison oak and the leaves were chewed to reduce stomach aches. Elderberry leaves were used to make a poultice to reduce swelling from bee stings and the berries could be eaten raw. Wild ginger was used to fight infection.

The Saclan did not rely on one single staple food as there were an abundance of food sources for them to eat. Other animals that were hunted as food were birds, deer, gophers, insects, lizards, snakes, moles, mice, ground squirrels, rabbits, raccoons, and foxes.

For clothing and bedding, the grey fox and the black-tailed jackrabbit, the bobcat, racoon and opossum were preferred. The Saclan knew a great deal about how animals thought and acted. They were skillful at tracking and expert at making animal calls and had such keen senses that they could sometimes smell an animal even before they could see it. Although the Saclan hunted many animals, they did not hunt coyote as they believed that coyote had created the world so they worshipped and respected him.

The most important indigenous plants to the Saclan were the oak trees that grew in abundance in this area because they produced acorns, a staple food of the native people. There are two main types of oaks: The Coast Live Oak grows throughout the Bay Area. It has prickly leaves and produces smallish acorns. Although this tree loses many of its leaves in the fall and winter, it never loses all of its leaves. Live oaks can produce as many as 200 pounds of acorns each year. The Valley Oak occupies the inland valleys of our region. It has larger, flat leaves and produces bigger acorns. In Winter, all of its leaves have fallen off, leaving its branches bare. Valley oaks can produce around 350-500 pounds of acorns each year. A family of five people could collect over 33,000 pounds of acorns in two weeks if they worked eight hours each day.

Throughout the year the people held various feasts, gatherings, and religious dances, many of them tied to the biological rhythms of the oak trees. The acorn harvest in the fall marked the beginning of the new year. Winter was spoken of as so many moons after the acorn harvest, summer as so many moons before the next acorn harvest. Each fall, the members of the tribe would all work together to collect as many acorns as possible. First, they would collect acorns from near the village, then go farther out to find more oak trees and more acorns. It was important to collect as many acorns as possible since they would have to last through the Winter, Spring and Summer until more acorns would be ripe again in the Fall. Other native animals depended on acorns for food as well. Blue jays, squirrels, deer and woodpeckers all ate acorns as part of their diet.



The Saclan relied on acorns as an important part of their diet. After the acorns were collected, they had to be saved for many months. Large storage baskets, called granaries, were constructed to hold the acorns. They were built to hold acorns away from the ground so that acorns wouldn't get wet and moldy. The granaries were lined with bay laurel leaves to keep insects out. A top made of leaves or grass kept out other animals. Other Miwok tribes built different types of granaries but all were used to store the collected acorns. The type of granary that was constructed depended on the materials available to use.

Tools used by the Saclan were often made from stones. They were used for digging, for grinding, and for hammering. Digging sticks were also used as tools.

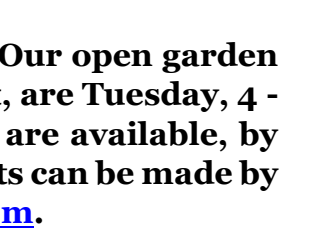
ARROWHEADS FROM THE SITE OF
 STATION 100 IN THE ST. LAWRENCE
 RIVER, QUEBEC, CANADA, 1000-1500

FIGURE 81: 15 LITHIC WEAPONS OF THE
 ST. LAWRENCE RIVER
 GROUP AT STATION 100, AND
 STATION 100, ST. LAWRENCE RIVER

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ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral Histories, which date from the 1970s, have been stored on tapes and discs in the History Room. Many of these tapes have recently been digitized and are available for viewing on the Historical Society Website – lafayettehistory.org. In the top row on the website you will find Archives/Oral Histories which will take you to the oral histories. Below is a list of the tapes that tell about early life in early Lafayette. The committee continues to work to make additional tapes available.

Bill Wakeman: Bill's parents bought land in the center of Lafayette and built a house in 1918. In this interview he talks about growing up here in the 1920's and early 1930's. Lafayette School was easy to get to, but after that he had to take the Sacramento Northern train to Mount Diablo High School in Concord. Bill describes how life changed after 1936, when the Bay Bridge and Caldecott Tunnel were opened and the pace of housing development increased. He also describes serving as a member of the Lafayette Improvement Association, then, after the city was incorporated, on the Circulation Commission and the City Council. Bill also remembers finding Saclan arrowheads in the Lafayette Creek.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE 2022

Welcome to our new members and to those who have recently renewed their membership or have made a donation:

Kathy Merchant
Trudy Salter
Frank Barham
Nancy Flood
Jane Minor
Kirk Allen
Allen Hopkins

Jennifer Rosen
Patricia Whitten
Karl Pister
Sande Hubbs
Jeff Crenshaw
Michelle Fanto-Chan
Ray & Susie Parker

Sharon Meckenstock
John Kasper
Richard Silbert
Carol Singer
Paul Sheehan
Lou Cosso
Glen Zamanian

Thank you for your support of the Lafayette Historical Society.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES

Your membership is exceedingly important as it makes it possible for our organization to pay annual rent to the City of Lafayette for our space and be able to pay for our phone, insurance, and other needed supplies. If you have a **red dot** on your address label for this issue, your membership is up for renewal in the next month or two. If you have a **red L** on your address label you are a Life Member and do not pay dues so if you'd like to make a donation it would be appreciated. We have made a small increase in membership fees effective July 2021.

Student Membership is \$15

Individual Membership is \$30

Family Membership is \$60

Additional Donations are always appreciate. Please send to LHS

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www.lafayettehistory.org

LHS

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Return service requested

Thank you to Lauren Deal of the Dudum Real Estate Group for sponsoring this issue!!



I love Lafayette!

From Happy Days Preschool, Lafayette Elementary,
Stanley Middle School and Acalanes High School, my
roots are firmly planted in Lafayette.

I am fortunate to live and work in this amazing community
and beyond proud to help new families find their place or sell
a cherished family home in my beloved town.



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