

Book Review of The Northern Maidu

"Mrs. Potts is not an amateur writer. She approaches her topic with skill and dignity. Neither is the book a diatribe against white injustice. Rather, the book is a quite complete story of the tribe which lived at the base of Mt. Lassen. She says that there were no uprisings in Maidu country. 'The white settlers who came to our area were glad to have Indian labor, and records show some fair dealings,' she writes. To prove her point, she tells the story of a troublesome white man who killed an Indian without provocation. A court was assembled immediately. The white jurors found their racial compatriot guilty of murder and hanged him.

"Mrs. Potts says the greatest problem between the two races arose from a differing concept of property. The Indians intended to loan their land. The settler interpreted it as a permanent cession of rights. This was also true of other possessions. The Maidu customarily left their boats at strategic points for navigating the many lakes and rivers. Yet, in one case, a white man, thinking he had 'found' a boat, donated it to a museum in Sacramento.

"The 20 short chapters in the book treat all aspects of Maidu life. Customs, religion, art, and recreation are described. Mrs. Potts says that although the Maidu are of medium height, they have produced many notable athletes, including Seymour Smith, a professional boxer, who ran from Medford to San Francisco to celebrate the opening of the Golden Gate Bridge.

"The section on conservation is among the most interesting and applicable. Mrs. Potts says, 'Earth was the mother, who furnished the food, and we were considerate not to leave her scarred.' Some plants were invariably left for seed, some eggs in the nest, and some berries for birds and squirrels. Animals ready to bear young and fish ready to spawn were spared. The explanations of food gathering and preservation methods are in simple useful language and detailed enough to serve as a manual for wilderness survival.

"Mrs. Potts writes with authority. She was born in 1895 at Big Meadows, California, presently the site of Lake Almanor. When she grew up, she worked her way through Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Afterwards she returned to California, married, and had five children. In 1975 she was honored by her native state for her achievements in helping the Indian people. Among her credits are a key role in establishing the American Indian Press Association, co-founding the Federated Indians of California Tribal Council, founding *Smoke Signal*, the oldest Indian newspaper focusing on the struggle for Indian rights. When she was honored, Mrs.

Potts said, 'I'm glad you did it while I'm still alive.' She was then 80 years old. Her Indian name 'Chankutpan' translates 'one with sharp eyes.' It is the sharp observation and equally sharp memory of her childhood which make *The Northern Maidu* delightful." (Betty Miller, *The Mail Tribune* (Medford, Oregon), December 1, 1977)