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From Fishing Weirs to Fancy Baskets: How changes in Native American basketry forms reflect changes in the economic independence of Native American women during colonization.

by

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THE MASTER OF ARTS PROGRAM IN LIBERAL STUDIES
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Introduction

I. Socioeconomic role of women and subsistence basketry in two Native American communities at the time of contact with European explorers

   A. Egalitarian agricultural communities among the Coastal and Northeastern Algonquin
   B. Egalitarian hunter-gatherer communities among the Chinook Wasco-Wishram

II. Colonization and the economics of trade between Euro-American and the Coastal Algonquin, Euro-American and the Wasco/Wishram

   A. Colonization and the impact of trade among the Coastal Algonquin
   B. Colonization and trade among the Chinook Wasco-Wishram

III. The emerging wage/market economy and changes in basketry among two Native American communities

   A. Euro-American collectors and Indian weavers among the Coastal Algonquin
   B. Euro-American collectors and Indian weavers among the Chinook Wasco and Wishram

IV. Fancy Baskets: Accommodation and Resistance

Works Cited

Appendix
List of Figures in Appendix

1) “Yohicake” bag: circa 1650

2) Wasco/Wishram twined bag: late 18th to early 19th century

3) Plateau Corn husk bag: circa 1880

4) Plateau Corn husk bag: circa 1910

5) Algonquin storage basket: purchased prior to 1839

6) Mohegan wall pocket: circa 1875-1900

7) Wasco/Wishram round twined bag: mid to late 19th century

8) Wasco style twined bag: circa 1880
Abstract

Contrary to the absence of Native American women in many reports and journals of early explorers and colonists, Native American women from the Coastal Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram communities played a central role in early trade with Euro-Americans through their traditional socioeconomic status as agricultural and subsistence gatherers and inter/intra-tribal tradeswomen. These native women harvested available natural resources for food, bark, and fiber with which they fed their communities and constructed baskets in standard units of measurement for trade reflecting that pre-contact trade networks and food value systems were well established and highly valued. Through an examination of scholarly research regarding the culture, history, and basket technology of the Coastal Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram this study reveals how the socioeconomic status of these native women was altered and disenfranchised. While Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram tradeswomen provided the majority of the calorie intake for their communities, owned the homes, villages, and land-base they made and worked, were politically influential and socially autonomous, they were cut out of the developing international trade and market economy, and marginalized by the growing Euro-American population. Basket making as a traditional cultural practice produced functional utilitarian tools, household items, and surplus packaging for trade; it also defined native culture and during the course of colonization enabled some native communities to continue important cultural practices and even establish federal recognition.

The pre-contact egalitarian cultural practices, agricultural and subsistence work, and basket technology of women from the Coastal Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram native communities is described and discussed, followed by the impact of early trade and the developing new market economy. The introduction of new trade items influenced basket technology differently within each native community, yet the impact on native tradeswomen and their socioeconomic status is similar. Changes in basket technology and construction reveal the manner in which native women accommodated and resisted the cultural impact of the growing Euro-American population and new market economy. Changes and time frames are organized using major basket making periods of Classic Period, Transitional Period, and Hiatus Period in conjunction with pre-contact/early contact, colonial era, and early industrial era. Native communities across the continent experienced the phases of contact and colonization in successive waves making the use of numerical dates cumbersome when discussing the Algonquin who experienced contact and cultural disruption much earlier than the interior Wasco/Wishram. In this regard, basket making periods were also experienced in different sequences dependant on the degree of colonial influence and disruption to each native community. While Native American women were either left out of or stereotyped in early research, this examination utilizes a range of historical studies, along with more contemporary work focused on reconstructing the cultural context of native women lives to show how colonization impacted native women’s socioeconomic status.
Introduction

I. Socioeconomic role of women and subsistence basketry in two Native American communities at the time of contact with European explorers

Prior to contact with Europeans, many Native American women were successful inter-and intra-tribal tradeswomen who maintained vital economic and political roles within their communities by harvesting available natural resources for food, bark, and fiber. Abundant natural food resources were gathered by native women seasonally; the food items were distributed at a family and community level and surplus food was prepared for storage and/or trade. Alongside food gathering, native women harvested tree bark, roots, and plant fiber to make functional utilitarian containers and baskets to aid their work. They used their basket technology in all aspects of their food activities creating a symbiotic relationship between basketry, food, trade, and wealth. Native women’s basket technology was regionally distinctive, reflecting available materials, native uses, and tribal aesthetics. Some forms of pre-contact basketry from the Coastal Algonquin and Columbia River Wasco/Wishram communities were constructed in standard units of measurement which reflects the significant economic role these tradeswomen and their basket technology maintained.

While native women in these two communities participated in a subsistence, barter-based economy centered at the household and community level, they also traded their surplus food items with other native communities for things they wanted, enabling them to create wealth. In this barter-based subsistence economy, native women’s basketry contained goods that had an economic value, and the baskets themselves were valued as goods. When baskets were full of berries or pulverized salmon or corn they were at their most valuable. The trade
value of native women’s basket-packaged surplus food is an important link to understanding the traditional socioeconomic status of native women. Through their ability to independently create wealth, these native women also maintained important political roles and a high level of personal autonomy. Political influence, personal autonomy, and economic independence were features of egalitarian native cultural practices in which native men and women held complementary but equal roles and both native men and women contributed to the political and economic stability of the community.

Pre-contact Coastal Algonquin and Wasco-Wishram were two native communities which were culturally structured in an egalitarian manner and experienced pressure to change to Euro-American westernized standards. Prior to contact with Euro-Americans both women and men in Coastal Algonquin and Wasco-Wishram communities participated in maintaining and contributing to the political and economic stability of the community in separate yet complementary ways. In egalitarian cultures the contributions and activities of each gender had equal value within the community; separate spheres didn’t translate as unequal spheres. Typical features of egalitarian societies include social groups which were, in general, highly flexible in band membership, leadership was informal, and groups practiced egalitarian patterns of sharing. For example, reciprocal access to gathering fields was extended to others through marriage ties, visitors, and sharing or generalized reciprocity within the camp, and consensus among the band was arrived at through persuasion and freely given. Decisions were made by those who would be carrying out the related responsibilities, therefore individual autonomy was necessary (Furniss 3; Leacock and Lee 7-8; Leacock 249).

As Euro-American contact and influence spread across the North American continent
during colonization, the basic economic unit of community, band, and large extended kin
groups in which native women played important roles was altered by decades of political and
economic cultural disruption resulting in individual or small nuclear family units headed by
male members. Likewise, subsistence labor was dichotomized into male and female labor
reflecting public and private spheres. Native women’s traditional economic contributions
were relegated to unpaid domestic labor, and wage labor available to Native women during
the colonial and industrial periods was predominately low wage, low status domestic work.
An examination of changes in Coastal Algonquin and Wasco-Wishram basket making
technology during the historic contact period to the mid-20th century reveals how native
women in these two communities experienced a shift from independent tradeswomen to a
marginalized and domestic status. Changes in the bark, root, and fiber basket technology of
Coastal Algonquin and Wasco-Wishram women shows the introduction of new trade goods
and trade patterns which altered the subsistence economy of Native women. How these
basket were made, who they were traded with and what they contained tells the story of how
native women struggled to maintain their socioeconomic status while also revealing the
adaptive resourcefulness they exhibited throughout colonialism and the nation building of the
United States.

While intertribal trade was well-established prior to contact, prolonged international
trade with Europeans changed the economic value of native women’s subsistence economy,
basket technology, and their ability to create wealth. Similarly, colonial trade and the
evolution of a new market economy changed the socioeconomic status of Native American
women because European contact strategies focused on establishing political and economic
relationships solely with Native American men. European explorers and colonist's cultural and gender bias overlooked the important role Native American women played in trade and political decision making. Native women who were present during contact situations were not "seen" by European explorers and colonists for the key political and economic roles they played, perhaps because there was no gender equivalent for them in European society.

While not "seeing" the position of native women may reflect the Eurocentric and gender bias early explorers, colonist, missionaries, and traders maintained toward women in general, the subsequent research based on their journals, reports, and letters disenfranchises, stereotypes, or romanticizes the few native women that were mentioned. In that regard, researching native women and their roles within their communities, either pre-contact, during historic times, or throughout colonization is a process of "look[ing] for the women"; realizing that women were present in most societies, groups, and communities when working with documents created by non-Native men for other non-Native men (Kugel and Murphy xxvi). Clues to the existence and status of native women are visible in their economic production, their children, their marriages, and in their material goods such as baskets. The research for the bases of this examination of native women is centered on a range of scholarly work about Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram communities which tries to reflect a well rounded view of native women's roles. David French provides a systematic study of influences and culture change in Wasco/Wishram society, Theodore Stern's work focuses on the trade network along the Columbia River, and these historical cultural works are balanced by studies from Lillian Ackerman and Elizabeth Furniss which focus on the gender, social and egalitarian nature of Plateau society.
The work of Robert Grumet, Karen Kupperman, and Camilla Townsend provide well documented studies of Algonquin culture during historic contact and how explorers interpreted their observations. Studies by Trudie Lamb Richmond and Amy Den Ouden, along with Helen Rountree, and Kathleen Brown provided additional information regarding the social and political context of Algonquin women’s lives during historic contact and their work is supported by a range of studies about commodity and exchange and accommodation strategies of particular Algonquin groups throughout the Northeast. Information about the basket technology of native women from these two groups is found within the in-depth studies of Wasco/Wishram sally and corn husk bags by Mary Dodds Schlick, Robin Wright, and supported by Bill Mercer’s beautiful display of Columbia River art. Eva Butler produced incredible studies of early Algonquin culture and their use of corn and birch bark, while Russel Handsman and Ann McMullen provide a comprehensive look at wood splint basketry. The cultural context of basket peddlers and the significance of basketry in northeast Indian communities are provided by an additional range of studies which look at how basket making shaped Indian lives and their economic strategies. Sarah Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh’s indispensable volume *Indian Baskets* provides a comprehensive guide to Native North American basket makers and this examination of Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram baskets utilizes Turnbaughs basket making periods, Classic Period, Transitional Period, and Hiatus Period, to discuss the phases of changes in native basket making.

What emerges from this examination of changes in basket technology and the socioeconomic status of native women from the Coastal Algonquin and Columbia River regions is not just the effects early contact trade, the developing international fur trade, and
the emergence of a new market economy had on the status of native women but also how the continuity of cultural practices defined native communities and their relationship to their environment. The creation and/or continuity of traditions is an important feature when tracing cultural traditions and artifacts through time periods of cultural disruption as experienced by Native American communities throughout historic colonial time. An additional feature of egalitarian communities is that while individuals own their tools and the tools were easily lent or borrowed, people generally possess the resources and skills to replace them (Furniss 3; Leecock and Lee 7-8). The practice of basket making within Native American communities, whether as a traditional tool or as an economic adaptation, is an example of a continuity of tradition. Possession of the resources and skills to continue making baskets was vital to some Native communities throughout their decades of cultural disruption. While basket-making was originally a subsistence skill of native women, during the years of great economic struggle during post-contact times native men also participated in basket making in an effort to equally contribute to their household and the economic stability of their community.

The fact that native men participated in basket making to aid household and community income speaks to the central importance of this traditional skill to native communities and also allows researchers to trace how basket making changed during hard economic times within native communities. While Native American women were largely marginalized and invisible socially, economically, and politically during post-contact time, the activities of native men were scrutinized and recorded by anthropologists, historians, and ethnographers. Through this ethnohistoric emphasis on the basket technology produced by
Native men during post-contact time a rather sideways glance of Native American women’s life and their methods of “sociocultural authority” can be traced. “Sociocultural authority” is “a Native American leadership role (not necessarily political) in the creation and/or continuity of traditions within an Indian tribe” (Fawcett-Sayet 28). The “sociocultural authority” and basket making trends of native women of the Coastal Algonquin and Wasco-Wishram differ during the historic contact period to the mid-20th century reflecting the different impact international trade and colonization had on each community.

A. **Egalitarian agricultural communities among the Coastal and Northeastern Algonquin**

Pre-contact Algonquin communities were egalitarian in that men and women contributed equally to the economic and political stability of the community, and men and women maintained complementary but equal roles. Algonquin women contributed food items through their agricultural practices, they owned the homes and villages they made, and they held leadership positions within their communities, all of which established and strengthened their sociocultural authority. Their subsistence activities enabled Algonquin women to gain wealth and achieve economic independence through trade in surplus food items, which included basket technology in which food items were gathered, measured, and stored. Algonquin women throughout the middle Atlantic and Northeast practiced agriculture to the extent each regions’ growing season would allow; in addition they gathered seasonal food stuff provided within their regional environment. Algonquin men hunted and fished, and helped clear agricultural fields; in addition, when necessary, they engaged in warfare with
other native communities to defend their hunting and agricultural territory.

The Algonquin lived in villages and camps of longhouses or round houses covered with sheets of bark or woven mats. Villages sheltered a few families to several hundred individuals; however, during festivals, trade fairs, and wartime certain communities occasionally swelled to several thousand people. Algonquin communities were largely nomadic; they moved seasonally to locations where their food supply was grown, gathered, or hunted. In general, winter months were spent hunting in a northern or interior location. Spring time activities took the communities “down river” to fishing sites and locations where they cleared fields for planting corn. Spring and summer activities combined fishing and planting corn, weeding and hillling corn, and fishing some more. Spring and summer fishing tasks were performed by both men and women. Both sexes constructed the weirs and nets that collected the “enormous anadromous fish runs every spring” and both sexes speared, netted, and hooked fish from the shore and canoes (Grumet 56). Late summer was spent harvesting and drying corn and after the corn was gathered and dried some was stored in “Indian barns” (caches dug into the ground), the remainder was carried “up river” to the winter hunting region (Butler 11).

While individual Algonquin communities differed in certain details such as sources for food, clothing, tools, or housing styles they shared common cultural and social features. For example, Algonquin communities were egalitarian and matrilineal; “chieftainship was inherited through the female line” (Townsend 15) and while women as well as men held leadership positions “power passed through women” (Townsend 15); in addition, their pre-contact subsistence economy valued equally the labor and contributions of men’s hunting and
women’s agriculture. The economics of subsistence communities were based on household and clan relationships in which Algonquin women controlled the distribution of food and the use of land. Land was held in common; nevertheless, it was also considered to belong to those who planted and labored in the agricultural fields. In this sense, “the economic primacy of corn certainly reinforced women’s cultural relationship to the land: because women were the primary agriculturalists in their communities, their intense use of the land established and maintained their rights to it” (Richmond and Den Ouden 181). Egalitarian social practices of sharing meant that land and its natural resources were available to anyone in need; however, collective inherent ownership defaulted to the women who cultivated the fields providing substantial provisions for the entire community.

Because corn could not survive without assistance, its cultivation set in motion the crux of the Algonquin economic cycle which influenced the rest of Algonquin culture. “Corn could not just be planted and left to fend for itself until harvest time, nor could all of the Indians give all of their time to the cultivation of the growing corn. It was necessary for them to secure supplementary food to augment their supplies, and in their solution of this problem we find an explanation for the dichotomy of labor” (Butler 10). Corn provided up to seventy-five percent of the yearly calories consumed by native communities who cultivated it; on the other hand, the fish and game provided by the men contributed highly valued protein. In the pursuit of both corn and game, men and women helped each other and these activities set in motion the rhythms of village life (Brown 29-30). In addition to being highly valued as food, corn could yield 600 grains for each kernel planted. Algonquin women in villages across Algonquin territories raised thousands of bushels of corn, along with beans, pumpkins,
melons, and other agricultural crops and they traded an average of one thousand bushels of corn each year (Murphy 78). As a consequence, corn quickly became a staple food of the early settlers and it was often used as a substitute for money (Butler 6; Brown 27-42). Algonquin women’s corn currency enabled them not only to equally contribute to the economic stability of the community, but also provided them with a means of accumulating wealth through trade with other native communities and eventually with the European newcomers. Within their native community Algonquin women’s economic roles were acknowledged and equally valued, which enhanced their sociocultural authority.

**Socioeconomic status of Algonquin women**

Within the social structure of Algonquin communities, leadership roles were not distinctly political, but rather a blend of roles or responsibilities which contributed to the creation and/or continuity of traditions. Maintaining the traditions and continuity of the community, which kept intact the identity of the people, was also accomplished by healers, oral historians, and craftspeople, such as basket makers. Individuals who performed these occupational specialties were considered community members with “sociocultural authority” (Fawcett-Sayet 28). Sociocultural authority and civil leadership went hand-in-hand; furthermore, the sociopolitical control of Coastal Algonquin society lay with the civil leadership which was based on matrilineal-matrilocal kinship groups. “All domestic affairs were regulated by the matriclan. Decisions concerning subsistence, social life, and family religious obligations were made by the corporate kin group” (Grumet 46). In this kin group
social structure, women maintained pivotal positions with community wide responsibilities, including civil leadership.

In general, Coastal Algonquin communities consisted of five levels of sociopolitical integration: the clan or kin group, the village, the district, the tribe, and the confederacy. Civil decisions were made by consensus and those not in agreement with a specific policy were free to remove themselves from those who instilled it (Grumet 47; Leacock 249). Sociopolitical leadership roles were won by men and women who exhibited wisdom and admirable traits of character; individuals who demonstrated the ability to resolve conflicts, as well as maintain and strengthen alliances (Richmond and Den Ouden 180). Algonquin communities were primarily small, reflecting life at a peaceful village level. The sociopolitical integration at the larger tribe and confederacy level was generally a response to unusual stress. Civil leadership governed during peacetime; however, civil leaders were also responsible for declaring war and installing the military regime when necessary.

Algonquin women, as well as men, held civil leadership roles. While the majority of early ethnographic reports refer to Algonquin civil leaders as sachems, saga mores, or cockarouse, and these leaders were assumed to be men, a closer reading of the early reports by contemporary scholars reveal that Coastal Algonquin women sachems and sunksquaws played a considerable political role throughout the historic contact period. “Many sources state that women sunksquaws were able to inherit chiefly office,” and “women sachems were often the sisters or wives of male leaders who succeeded them upon their decease;” however, “many women sachems were married to men who made no pretension to leadership” (Grumet 49). Marriage and kinship ties were a part of political alliances and alliances.
include tribute paid to leaders in the form of corn. Therefore, native women in matrilineal societies of coastal New England were a visible political and economic force because “[n]ative women’s daily labor embodied their true power: power over the reproduction of community life as well as the subsistence economy” (Richmond and Den Ouden 181). As overseers of the reproduction of community life, and as an important element in egalitarian communities, native women stressed communal values and traditions of sharing and reciprocity. As a result, leaders who received tribute were also responsible for feeding and entertaining guests as well as providing for the poorest in the village.

Algonquin women’s participation in an egalitarian society, their role as civil leaders, homeowners, food producers, along with their ability to accumulate wealth independently of men, resulted in a level of individual autonomy which extended to their personal life. While first marriages may have been arranged in some circumstances, young people generally had a say in the manner. At the same time, divorce was easy and at the desire of either partner (Leacock 249). Algonquin women had a great deal of sexual autonomy; for example, polygyny was common in Algonquin marriages in which co-wives were often sisters sharing one man, and women were permitted affairs with the husband’s permission. Furthermore, temporary marriages by contract, with a time period and renewable agreement, were available to women; young unmarried women could take lovers or experiment with trial marriages, and girls had the right to reject a suitor and choose their own spouse (Rountree 22; Brown 31). Individual autonomy was a valued principle in egalitarian band/foraging societies where individual initiative and decisiveness along with co-operation, rather than authoritarianism, was more beneficial to the stability of the group. Women as well as men
were autonomous and this benefited the group because all individuals freely chose their alliances to each other and the group. This general sense of shared co-operation among and between all individuals and groups contributed to the overall stability of pre-contact Algonquin communities.

Algonquin basketry and the distribution of food

Pre-contact basketry was intimately related to women’s subsistence and economic activities which centered on the production and distribution of food, and it is this cultural feature that enabled women to accumulate wealth and positions of cultural authority. The household/clan/corn economy of the pre-contact Algonquin coincided with the “Old Birch-bark Hunting Culture” in which women were skilled experts in birch-bark technology. Using birch bark, women erected quick and efficient shelters, made light-weight waterproof utensils and covers for canoe frames (Butler and Hadlock 7). Few original birch-bark articles have survived; however, colonial records describe several uses of birch-bark construction that played significant economic roles within women’s corn and household economy. Because birch-bark is durable, waterproof, odorless, tasteless and resistant to decay, it protects stored items, such as food, from spoiling. “Equally important was the fact that enough birch-bark for the Indian’s needs was almost always just outside their wigwams” (Butler and Hadlock 6-7). Birch-bark was symbiotic with Algonquin women’s corn economy; for example, women used sheets of birch-bark to sun-dry their corn, they stored dried corn in bushel size birch-bark baskets, and they lined the underground walls of their
“Indian barns” (underground granary) with birch-bark. Birch-bark made ideal household utensils for storing and carrying food and water because it imparts no taste to whatever it contains. Food was often cooked over a low fire in green birch-bark containers filled with water; however, this application was usually serviceable just once (Butler and Hadlock 19-20). Folding and sewing birch-bark produced pails, which could hold up to two or three gallons, and baskets that could hold four bushels or more. Birch-bark pails and baskets were a form of measurement for the food items women gathered, harvested, and traded. Algonquin women could make birch-bark pails and baskets in an hour’s time from the bark stripped from a tree (Butler 32); however, birch-bark containers didn’t last very long. The baskets and pails broke and became brittle with use and because birch-bark was readily available containers weren’t preserved as heirlooms. Equally important, in pre-contact and early colonial times, Indians buried utilitarian items such as baskets and stores of corn with their deceased for use in the afterworld illustrating how valued these cultural commodities were for the Algonquin in each world.

Dried corn stored in “Indian barns” in bushel-size birch baskets was just one way in which Algonquin women developed such a close association between food and basketry. Algonquin women also prepared parch corn flour for times when members of the community traveled. Corn was parched in hot ashes then sifted through a small basket and beaten into a powder. Early colonial records called this parch corn flour noca, Nokehick, Yoakheag, Yoke-hegg, or yokeag and their early records describe how this particular food item was carried or stored in “a long leatheme bag, trussed at their backe like a knapsacke” or carried in a basket or bag suited for traveling (Butler 28-29). Yokeag is described as a “readie very
wholesome food” which was eaten with a little bit of water, hot or cold, and could sustain individuals while traveling for several days. A basket or bag suitable for carrying like a “knapsacke” describes an Algonquin “Yohicake” bag which is constructed by twining Indian hemp, a plant fiber harvested from *Apocynum cannabinum* and knee-spun, into twine or string. A flexible weft-twined “Yohicake” bag or basket, believed to have been made around 1642 from Indian hemp is held by the Connecticut Historical Society. This bag is possibly the only example of a typical aboriginal Algonquin twined textile made of hemp; nevertheless, its existence, supported by the extensive use of parch corn flour in early colonial records, demonstrates that twined hemp bags for transporting, storing, and trading corn were widely used and considered essential in Algonquin women’s basket-corn economy. (see Fig 1)

Another essential basket weaving technology that appears in early colonial reports is woven mats made from “flaggs” or rushes used by Algonquin women for wigwam coverings, windows and doorways, and to regulate ventilation. Aside from the technological advantage the features of the mats provided for Algonquin women in their homes, the importance or significance of these mats lay in the colonists’ desire for them. Early colonial reports discuss the colonists’ admiration for these mats because they were “handsome” and let in no rain or wind and kept houses warm. Colonist began to seek out the mats for their own houses and if the mats couldn’t be bought or traded they were stolen (Butler 32; Kupperman 157). The practical comfort the mats provided was obvious to early colonists and their desire for the mats made news in early reports and in contemporary anthropological studies regarding the exchange of cultural artifacts and influences between the Indians and the English. Also worth
noting is that the manner of exchange was not always reciprocal, which highlights the changing dynamics of Indian and European relations and the perceived value of native women’s commodities.

The journals of early colonists report events of brisk trading with Algonquin women who willing traded their coats, their husbands’ skins and pelts, oysters and beans, and their corn surpluses (Grumet 56-57; Richmond and Den Ouden 181; Brown 37). Corn was the provenance of women and economically it was the source of female authority (Brown 42) and this authority was clear to the early colonists because the hardiest colonists survived starvation during their early years only through trade with Indian communities to obtain corn. Likewise; Eva Butler’s research regarding Algonquin culture and its uses of corn and birch-bark reveal that the ingenuity of design and utilitarian function of basket technology which accompanied Algonquin corn economy and village construction was admired by early colonists, some of whom took the time to describe it’s construction and uses in early reports.

In fact, early in the development of the Jamestown colony, John Smith initiated trade with a very young Pocahontas. In 1612 Smith wrote in his journal in Algonquin, “Bid Pokahontas bring hither two little Baskets, and I will give her white beads to make her a chaine” (Smith, Map of Virginia). While researchers typically address this journal entry as Smith’s effort to document and learn the Algonquin language, it also offers a glimpse into basketry’s role in early contact trade. Unfortunately Smith offers no description of the baskets he sought; however he clearly understood that, even at a young age, Pocahontas was considered an independent tradeswomen and she understood the value of her “two little Baskets.” Pocahontas lived at a time when her culture enjoyed a standard of living that
allowed for leisure time in which wealth was reflected in the pursuit of cultural art and personal decoration. The exotic nature and pure colors of the white and blue glass beads the early explorers brought with them were coveted among the Indians because, while the Algonquin had within their reach everything they needed to live comfortably, a chain of glass trade beads to wear or woven into clothing and baskets exhibited wealth.

B. Egalitarian hunter-gatherer communities among the Chinook Wasco-Wishram

Pre-contact Wasco-Wishram communities lived on either side of the Columbia River where the Wasco inhabited the south side of the river in what is now Oregon State and the Wishram inhabited the north side in what is now Washington State. The Columbia River was an Indian travel route, which could take inland residents all the way to the Pacific Ocean and, likewise, bring coastal residents inland. The Wasco-Wishram communities each resided near the site of the present day city The Dallas in Oregon and frequently crossed the river to engage in subsistence activities as well as establish alliances through intermarriage and the development of trade relationships. The native communities in this Greater Plateau area shared a pacifistic and egalitarian social structure organized by bands or small village clusters. A network of intertribal influences existed as a result of the interdependence achieved through marriages, family bonds maintained through extended families, and familial generational influences. These relationships established “the Plateau tribes as a strong, yet flexible, political and economic system” which strove to maintain a peaceful existence (Wright 158). The Wasco-Wishram communities benefited through solidifying relationships with their extended alliances and maintaining productive relationships with
other native groups traveling through the area, and these attributes defined them as a people.

Pre-contact Wasco-Wishram communities were egalitarian in that men and women contributed equally to the economic and political stability of the community, and men and women maintained complementary but equal roles. Wasco-Wishram communities presided in the center of a region of great inter-and intra-regional exchange where diverse peoples congregated during late spring to late summer to trade goods (Stern 641) and in this diverse mix of gathering and trading, native women earned prestige by establishing themselves as good providers with strong economic skills. Wasco-Wishram women traded surplus food items which they gathered, measured, and stored in baskets made from knee-spun Indian hemp. Wasco-Wishram communities practiced a nomadic hunting, fishing, and gathering lifestyle in which salmon-fishing and root gathering were their major sources of food. While fishing and hunting were men’s occupations, women processed and dried the fish and meat for the winter food supply and trade, establishing an equal yet complementary work force. However, wild plant roots were an equally important food item which was primarily gathered by women. Wasco-Wishram women gathered camas, cous, and bitterroot among many other varieties of roots and their knee-spun twined hemp technology provided root digging bags for gathering, measuring, and storing the vast amounts of roots needed to feed the community throughout the year.

The stretch along the Columbia River that included the Yakima, Snake, and Palouse River tributaries, and where the Wasco-Wishram made their seasonal villages is a part of the Mid-Columbia/Greater Plateau culture and region. Along this stretch, pre-contact native communities lived in small family settlements or camps creating scattered clusters of
multifamily dwellings. Women constructed mat-covered pole-frame structures which may have included semi-subterranean architecture. During the winter, when the fish weren’t running, the people occupied sheltered sites away from the riverbank; otherwise, during the spring house clusters were erected near important fishing sites. These spring settlements grew during the salmon runs which were also times for meeting old friends and new relatives, gambling, trading fish, dried roots, berries, and other products gathered from the area’s natural resources (French 342; Schlick 3). The principle Wishram village site located at the head of the Fivemile Rapids was known as Nizluidix and the important Wasco village site on the Oregon side was called wasqu (French 342). The Mid-Columbia/Plateau region produced the greatest exchangeable surplus of fish (French 345-346) as well as a constant flow of travel, news, and trade goods which passed rapidly up and down the river making the sites of the Wasco-Wishram villages a busy inter-tribal trade location. The combination of intense fishing and trading at these sites supported a subsistence economy in which men and women could create wealth through their own industriousness; furthermore, the Wasco-Wishram developed alliances with a diverse group of other Native communities in which they viewed themselves as important the people.

The Wasco-Wishram subsistence economy was based on gathering, fishing, and hunting. While the roots, berries and other plants that women gathered made up half of the diet contributing 70 percent of the diet’s calories, the salmon runs contributed one-third to one-half of the food and hunting provided the rest (Ackerman 80). Women gathered roots, berries, and plant fiber from early spring to late fall, which they processed for storage, trade, and winter use. Men fished and hunted and were primarily responsible for building the
fishing weirs; equally important, women also helped build fishing weirs by providing the lashing material for the weir tripods. This lashing material was the province of women and the inclusion of it in the building of the weirs represents how major tasks were performed by both men and women. Plateau societies considered egalitarianism a moral principle (Ackerman 78-79), and the important role of women in weir construction illustrates how the Wasco-Wishram enacted this egalitarian principle. This lashing material may have been cord or twine made from the knee-spun Indian hemp that women used in their basket technology, which was an extension of their food gathering activities. Basket technology and subsistence food gathering and preparation were symbiotic activities. Therefore, the symbiotic nature of basket technology/food gathering, as well as, the important egalitarian contribution women made to major tasks is reflected in the central role this lashing material played in the construction of fishing weirs.

The socioeconomic status of women

In keeping with important egalitarian contributions, accumulating wealth was not restricted by gender and women traded their surplus commodities independently of men (Ackerman 75-100). Both men and women were encouraged to develop strong economic skills and any vigorous, ambitious individual could work to accumulated surplus horses, trade goods, and handicrafts through intertribal trade. Plateau women presided over a region of exchange between diverse people. For example, people from the western Plateau brought skins, mats, silk grass, and bread made from couse root, which they exchanged for wapato,
horses, beads, and other items from the coastal traders. People from the foothills of the Rockies brought bear grass, horses, camas root, buffalo robes and other skins which they exchanged for wapato, salmon pemmican, and trade beads. People from the south were known to raid the area carrying off women and children for slaves along with bows and watertight baskets. Klamath traders brought pond lily seeds and other local products which they traded with the Wasco for horses, par fleches, and salmon pemmican. For the Wasco-Wishram, acquiring wealth meant coming into possession of finely made items from the diverse mix of native cultures with which they came in to contact. Possessing cultural items from groups throughout the region showed skill in trading, emphasized strong alliances, and displayed individual wealth.

Women earned prestige by establishing themselves as good providers with strong economic skills, and individuals with superior economic skills were politically influential. Political influence was not restricted to hunters or males but rather “good providers,” male or female. “Good providers” were credited with superior intelligence and were sought out for their opinions. In this sense, those with strong economic skills had access to political influence or power even though most villages were presided over by a male chief. This chief was elected to office by all the adults in the community. All the adults could speak and vote when an assembly was held and married couples’ votes did not need to coincide. Equally important, in some traditional Plateau groups women held chiefly, judicial, and advisory positions, and a male chiefs’ wife could serve as chief when the husband was absent or deceased.

In addition to their ability to control the distribution of food, own the homes they
made, and hold crucial political roles, women in Mid-Columbia Plateau societies were also autonomous in that “they held decision-making power over their own lives and activities to the same extent that men did over theirs” (Leacock 1978). In Plateau societies married couples were often separated during many parts of the yearly subsistence cycle and each partner was in complete charge of their own economic activities. In this system each individual decided how and when to meet their economic responsibilities. Through their trade network and relationships, Wasco-Wishram women were able to provide for themselves and their children, resulting in economic independence and personal autonomy. Personal autonomy included sexual autonomy.

While initial first marriages were often arranged by parents, second and subsequent marriage partners were chosen by the individual. Marriage was simply a couple taking up common residence, while divorce was accomplished by simply leaving the residence with one’s goods. Men and women had an equal right to divorce and some individuals may have had several spouses in a lifetime. Furthermore, divorce didn’t result in economic stress for either party. Each individual could move in with kin or live independently and women were able to support themselves and their children through their independent economic activities. Some marriages were polygynous, often co-wives were sisters or cousins who remained friends; on the other hand, non-related co-wives might be rivals. In this situation, because women were economically independent, they could opt for divorce if they pleased, and many did. The ability of Wasco-Wishram women to remain economically independent throughout marriage and divorce hinged on their ability to provide for themselves and create wealth through their subsistence activities - which included their basket technology. In this sense,
knee-spun Indian hemp was a girl’s best friend. Indian hemp provided the basis for making a root gathering bag and with a bag full of roots an industrious Wasco-Wishram woman held her own power.

**Basket technology and the distribution of food**

Indian hemp, *Apocynum cannabin*, was the most common native fiber Wasco-Wishram women used in their basket technology. “Many tribes used the strong fibers of Indian hemp, willow, and other fibrous barks for cord or string, but few have utilized them to the extent demonstrated by the people of the Columbia Plateau” (Schlick 16). Hemp twine was used for tying lodge frames together and to make dip nets, gill nets, and seines. Soft string was used to tie round bags around the waist when digging the staple roots and twine fishnets were strong enough to hold the ancient monster sturgeon, which could weigh over fifteen hundred pounds (Schlick 17). Plateau women also constructed a calendar from spun twine hemp in the form of a ball. The “counting the days” ball, or *ititamat*, was made by spinning a length of hemp and tying knots for each passing day. Births, deaths and extraordinary days were marked with beads, shells or other talismans and as the woman grew older her ball grew larger and harder to handle. The large cumbersome ball was kept as a record keeper while another ball was started to begin a new calendar.

The stems and twigs of Indian hemp contain an inherent insect repellent which is effective against the larvae of the codling moth and the black carpet beetle (Schlick 17), which make it an ideal material for storing food reserves and other valuables. It’s unknown
whether or not native weavers using Indian hemp were aware of the plant’s insect repellent property; however, having plenty of food stored away for winter was crucial to each family’s survival and having a surplus of stored food to trade was a huge economic advantage. As a consequence, the people of the Columbia River highly valued their basketry as household equipment and the basket was most valued when it was full of berries, roots, or salmon. Baskets filled with their intended harvest were a secure capital for a native family (Schlick 22). The twined root-digging bag, or “sally bag”, was the most versatile household basket among the Wasco-Wishram because it was used for gathering, storing, and trading food stores.

Bitterroot and salmon were the two most important foods for the people of the Mid-Columbia. Bitterroot was gathered by the women in the spring using the twined root-digging bag. The women tied the bag around their waist while they used a stick to dig the root out of the ground. Reports indicate that at one point “it was not unusual for a family to dig fifty pounds of roots in a day” and that a “supply of twenty-five gunny sacks full of dried roots would last until the next spring” (Schlick 52). A handful of dried bitterroots cooked in boiling water and mixed with dried salmon provided a hearty meal for an average-size family. Twined bags were made in a variety of sizes. Large bags, into which a digger emptied the contents of the bag tied around her waist, held about a bushel and a quarter of roots. Powdered salmon was another valued food item which was stored and traded in twine bags. “Lewis and Clark described great sacks of woven bags, each bag two feet long and one foot in diameter and lined with salmon skin that contained the concentrated powder of dried salmon known as ch’lay” (Schlick 55). Dried pulverized salmon in 90- to 100- pound bags
were a major item of trade for the people living around The Dallas. Reports state that each bag could hold the powder made from 100 salmon (Schlick 56; Stern 641).

The versatile twined “sally bag” was constructed using wrapped twining technology in which “one weft is carried along the inside of the weaving while the other weft remains on the surface. The two wefts are twisted around each other between warps” and in this manner a design is created by alternating colored wefts bringing the desire colored to the surface (Wright 183). Dark brown or black against a light tan background were the primary colors in Classic Period basket technology and the materials used were Indian hemp, cattail, and a variety of unidentified fibers. Wasco-Wishram “sally bags” are unusual in Plateau twined basketry in that the designs used clearly represent humans and types of animals rather than the typical geometric designs (Wright 183). A “sally bag” acquired by Lewis and Clark is woven with the complex geometric, human, and animal designs distinctive to the Wasco. The designs represent figures from the weaver’s daily life as well as the mythology of her people. (see Fig 2) “The best-known motifs – the face, the full human figure with exposed ribs, fish, deer or elk, salamanders, frogs and other water creatures, and birds – appear in the weaving from the earliest known examples to the end of the nineteenth century” (Schlick 64) and all but the x-ray human figure and face were still used in the 20th century. While weavers shared design motifs, they varied the arrangement or execution often telling a story through the bag and this produced a range of patterns with rarely two bags alike. The stylized faces and full figure of humans with skeletal details are intriguing because the same human figures appear on other cultural artifacts including carved sheep horn bowls, wooden mortars, pre-historic antler carvings and rock art. Some scholars suggest the skeletal figures represent a “ghost
cult” while others suggest they stem “from an ancient and widely held belief that the ancestors’ spirits reside in the bones” and associate the figures with the practice of the Columbia River people to rebury the bones of their dead to claim fishing sites (Schlick 68). When asked, native people today simply say the figures are the “old ones,” which speaks to the antiquity of the “sally bags” and its function as a cultural carrier as well as a utilitarian tool. The Wasco “sally bag” along with its sister bag, the Wishram flat twined “corn husk” bag or wallet, were the “ubiquitous containers;” they were strong enough to last for years (even when buried in the ground for storing food), they were flexible enough for flat storage, comfortable for carrying, and every family needed many bags.

The basket sizes evolved as standard measurements for trade. “A twined basket, eight inches in diameter and twelve inches deep, was the standard measure for the pulverized salmon,” while “dried salmon and salmon heads were offered in a smaller basket, eight inches wide and seven inches deep” (Schlick 56). In intertribal trade with coastal Indians a basket of dried salmon and heads was worth several baskets of dried clams. In 1805 Lewis and Clark purchased “4 Sacks of fish” and collected a root-storage “sally bag” full of roots, fish, and acorns. Typical of the ethnocentric gender bias of explorers at the time, the journals fail to mention acquiring the bag and what they traded for it; although it was prized enough that they returned East with it and it resides in the collection at the Peabody Museum at Harvard University (Schlick 18, 55). (see Fig 2) The “sally bags” woven into standard units of measurement for trading roots and salmon reflect Plateau women’s economic ingenuity and their vital role in the trade economy. In this sense, the ititamat, or “counting the days ball” marked a time when, as a full and equal participate in the social, economic, and
While the “sally bag” acquired by Lewis and Clark is woven with the complex human and animal designs distinctive of the Wasco, without mention of the woman with whom they traded, its story somehow remains faceless. The basket sitting on the museum shelf lacks its contents as well as its context. The woman Lewis and Clark traded with was independent and autonomous; she held important social and political roles within her community. She was a tradeswoman with equal access to the resources around her from which she constructed her own life and created her own wealth. “The Plateau [was] an area where women were not important because of their relations to men. They had their own importance and had access to public roles regardless of the status of their husbands” (Ackerman 98). Apparently this went unnoticed by Lewis and Clark and by failing to mention the encounter; much less any details about the exchange, Lewis and Clark rendered this woman anonymous. The Eurocentric bias of early explorers failed to notice and/or acknowledge the egalitarian nature of native communities, the independent and autonomous status of native women, as well as the important economic roles native women played and this often results in a lack of a clear and accurate historical data about native women.

Part II. Colonization and the economies of trade between Euro-Americans and the Coastal Algonquin, Euro-American and the Wasco/Wishram.

Initially, early trade with European explorers and colonists was barter based, and while this trade introduced new items into Native culture it didn’t immediately alter the
existing intertribal socioeconomic system. Over time, competing European countries began to establish permanent trade centers within Native territories and the international fur trade that developed created a dependency on European mercantile goods, caused political and economic disruption in many native communities, and resulted in territorial struggles in which the native land base was besieged. Traders, trappers, and developing colonies continually encroached on native land. In native egalitarian communities the land’s resources were available to everyone; however, the agricultural and/or gathering fields belonged to the women who maintained them. Private land ownership was not a native concept and as a result, land negotiations were not fully understood by native spokespersons nor were they fully honored by Euro-Americans.

As negotiations over land and property rights between native communities and the emerging colonial society and governments ensued, native women were pushed out of their agricultural and gathering grounds deepening the disruption to their subsistence economy and the political independence of their tribal culture. In addition, when native communities attempted to regroup their tribal structure after a conflict with European settlers or a devastating epidemic in which large numbers of natives perished, well-established Euro-American gender divisions and labor restrictions were imposed on the re-emerging native social structures. In an effort to gain control of land and political power, the emerging colonial society pressured disrupted and fragmented native communities to accept gender roles which reflected European standards; for example the establishment of nuclear family units headed by a male member to whom private property could be deeded. In addition, native women’s subsistence activities were relegated to domestic labor causing native
women to become economically subordinated to men (Gonzales 124; Janiewski 142; Shoemaker 10).

Euro-American male traders considered native women’s subsistence contributions domestic and dependent on the supervision of male relations rather than independent economic marketable goods which they traded to create wealth. As western economic systems gained access to established indigenous markets, native tradeswomen were confronted by this Euro-American gender bias “[s]ince Euro-American men traded with and employed native laborers from their own gendered perspective about appropriate economic behavior, they insisted on dealing with Indian men and therefore succeeded to some extent in limiting women’s economic opportunities” (Shoemaker 11). In addition to the exchange of trade goods between colonial agents and Native American communities which involved a complex mix of changes in economic units, expanding mercantile activities, and the effects of capitalism, native communities were also confronted with political policies regarding relocation, and reservation and allotment acts.

As a result of Euro-American influences and stresses on the socioeconomic strategies of native communities, native women lost their status as independent tradeswomen with full opportunities for individual freedom. Instead they were forced into lower status western occupations which demonstrate how westernization and modernization were regressive for native women in that their individual rights and privileges were reduced (Mintz 247-269). Euro-American gender bias emphasized the importance of male economic roles and the establishment of nuclear family units in contrast to traditional egalitarian methods of complementary but equal gender roles and production of goods.
The subsistence contribution of native women became a domestic production which supplemented the developing wage labor income performed by native men; at the same time, Euro-American trade goods replaced the functional utilitarian basket technology of native women. In coastal Algonquin society the fur trade created a dependency on mercantile or industrial capital which contributed to their growing impoverishment and marginalization. This dependency effect on the fur trade and Euro-American mercantile/industrial capital was not as great within the Wasco-Wishram because they maintained a fishing/gathering subsistence economy based on trade in salmon and roots. Wasco-Wishram communities were able to continue to support themselves through their subsistence activities for a longer period of time while engaging in supplemental wage labor as an option rather than a necessity.

Meanwhile, as native women adapted their economic strategies to meet the changing demands of the emerging capitalist economy, their basket technology was altered. Coastal Algonquin communities experienced intensive disruption early in the seventeenth century and their basket technology entered a Hiatus Period in which few baskets were either produced or survived the continual cultural disruption. Algonquin basket technology re-emerges in the 18th century in a different form and once again becomes an important economic strategy among many Algonquin communities. In contrast, the Columbia River Wasco-Wishram communities were not impacted by contact with trappers and traders until the early 19th century. During this time their basket technology flourishes as native weavers incorporate new trade materials into their traditional basket techniques creating more elaborate and colorful designs within their sally bags and cornhusk bags. While this Transitional Period in Wasco-Wishram basket technology produced a profusion of new
colors and designs, the forms and weaving technique of the sally and cornhusk bags continued to reflect traditional styles. Overtime the Wasco-Wishram communities were disrupted by disease epidemics and relocated to reservations. By the late 19th century few weavers continued to make the sally and cornhusk bags. The few traditional bags that did exist became highly prized heirlooms used strictly for ceremonial purposes. The emergence and impact of colonial economies and social influences among the Coastal Algonquin and Columbia River Wasco-Wishram differ, which is reflected by the difference in sequence of Transitional and Hiatus Period basket technology, yet the effect of colonial trade on native tradeswomen is fairly similar. In both cases native tradeswomen maintained their important socioeconomic positions within their Native community, yet were marginalized and rendered landless by the dominate Euro-American society.

A. Colonization and the impact of trade among the Coastal Algonquian

Trade between European explorers and the Coastal Algonquin communities along the eastern seaboard began early in the 1500's when, each spring, Europe's mariners headed to Newfoundland cod fishing and whaling and the Coastal Algonquin were quickly drawn into commerce, competition, and conflict (Axtell 79-103). For Native Americans in this early contact period, trade with Europeans was barter based; in short, each party laid down their goods and negotiations over equal trade value took place using whatever means of communication worked. For Native Americans this early contact, barter-based trade resulted in the acquisition of exotic items which were incorporated into a traditional decorative or
functional cultural item which “derived [its] significance from Native contexts, rather than from the European economic and social environment for which the goods had originally been designed” (Richter 43). For example, metal items such as axes, kettles, sheet brass, and copper were pounded into arrow points or ornaments such as bracelets, finger rings, small breastplates, or tubular beads and bangles to sew on clothing or worn as earrings. Blue and white glass trade beads were made into chain necklaces or sewn on to clothing establishing the prestige and wealth of the wearer.

The acquisition and distribution of rare items brought prestige to the Native American trader or community who acquired it and initially Native Americans were enthusiastic trading partners. Over time, as the number of European colonists and settlements grew and the New World was flooded with their trade goods, the Algonquin began to use the trade item for its intended purpose; consequently, iron kettles and axes made numerous everyday tasks easier. At length, some traditional subsistence tools such as certain types of baskets were no longer made, while other types of material culture, such as clothing, were elaborated upon now that there was more time to spend on developing or enhancing the aesthetic elements of traditional items. Iron kettles and axes replaced traditional subsistence tools making native women’s work more efficient and perhaps creating additional leisure time; meanwhile, established egalitarian values regarding complementary but equal labor remained firm until the conduct of native labor and exchange was fundamentally altered. For instance, in egalitarian native communities hoarding goods was considered antisocial behavior; whereas, status and authority were positions earned by those who gave away the most (Richter 51-52). On the other hand, native villages with a geographical proximity or political ties to European
trading partners and the international fur trade benefited economically, as well as skillful young hunters who began to side-step traditional methods of food distribution and communal sharing. Individualistic, profit-seeking values of Western European capitalism began to influence young hunters and trappers who then redistribute their acquired wealth independently of their elders and kinswomen.

Eventually, these capitalistic values fundamentally altered the conduct of native labor and exchange. Hunting and trapping became commercial activities rather than shared subsistence activities and a growing dependency on the new Euro-American metal technology altered the work habits and migratory patterns of Algonquin community members. As native communities began to compete, instead of co-operate, with each other as well as the colonists and settlers, they experienced an increase in warfare. Native men became increasingly engaged in trade or warfare activities and they were absent from the village and their traditional roles within the native community for longer extended periods of time. As a result, for a brief time, native women experienced an increase in agricultural and intra/inter-tribal political tasks. For as long as they could, Algonquin women continued their roles of cultural authority; they cultivated their gardens, harvested their corn, controlled the distribution of food and influenced political decision making.

For decades prior to European settlement, Algonquin women were able to adequately provide their communities with enough stored food items year round. They stored their surplus corn in underground caches where they could access it when needed and they kept enough dried food on hand to winter over to the next spring. However, the number of European colonists increased and their settlements grew and they had become increasingly
dependent on native women’s surplus corn. As time went on colonists began to force trade at gun point leaving native communities without an adequate supply (Brown 38). Through the perspective of their ethnocentric gender bias, early European colonists regarded native women’s subsistence contributions as domestic labor dependent on the supervision of male relations, and in their efforts to gain control of land and political power, the emerging colonial society often treated trade in corn as tribute or booty rather than independent economic marketable goods which were the province of native women. Consequently, trappers and traders accounts offer exchange rates for pelts, tobacco, and wampum for metal tools, trade cloth, and weapons; however, the exchange value for the agricultural goods of Native American women are not mentioned (Brown 41). As a result, it remains largely unknown just how dependent colonists were on native women’s agricultural goods and just how economically disadvantaged this dependency left Algonquin women.

In addition to forced, inequitable trade exchanges with native women, colonial settlers encroached on their agricultural fields (Grumet 50; Murphy 84; O’Brien 323). Without unrestricted access to their own land to plant crops and gather seasonal food, native women lost their subsistence and surplus food stores which contributed to the stress placed on the native population and their traditional egalitarian features. “As a consequence of war, nutritional deprivation, and disease, Virginia Indians were reduced in numbers from the approximately 14,000 inhabitants of the Chesapeake Bay and tidewater in 1607 to less than 3,000 by the early eighteenth century” (Brown 42) and by the mid-17th century, repeated bouts of disease epidemics killed about 75 percent of the coastal Algonquin population (Richter 60-61). Colonial contact, permanent English settlements, and the development of
commodity production and exchange eventually disrupted native women’s traditional positions of subsistence contribution, and control of distribution while separating Native women from their land base. “Divorced from the land” (O’Brien 323) native women became alienated from each other and the traditional activities with which they were able to provide for their communities and accumulate wealth. Their traditional birch bark and hemp basket technology, which transported and held their corn stores and covered their wigwams, entered a Hiatus Period while Native women attempted to adjust to the changing circumstances around them. The twined hemp “Yohicake” bag or basket believed to have been made around 1642 and held by the Connecticut Historical Society is possibly the last example of traditional Algonquin basket technology produced during a time when Algonquin women had to shift their economic roles from women’s clan/kinship mode of subsistence contribution to a colonial domestic sphere of production. (see Fig 1)

The making of this twined hemp bag required the stability of time and place. Harvesting the fiber from Indian hemp requires knowing where the plant grows, the best time to cut and ret the stalks, time to beat the fiber from the dried stalks, and then time to knee spin the fiber into the desired form of twine used for various tasks. This in itself is a year long process. Twining the bag and developing the design requires additional patience and expertise. Early bags were decorated with false embroidery using natural bear grass or moose hair to add another shade or color to the tan color of natural Indian hemp. Dyed colors of bear grass or animal hair were another step requiring knowledge, materials, and time. The native woman who wove this bag lived at a time when the community enjoyed a semi-sedentary subsistence pattern which allowed for leisure time during the winter months in
which to weave and incorporated intricate sophisticated bands of colored geometric designs. Winter basket weaving was an economic strategy involving a planning process that took into account the spring and summer work of planting and tending corn fields to assure an abundant harvest which produced the winter surplus food stores plus extra for trade. Algonquin women’s economic strategies evolved through generations of subsistence activity and planning centered around their extensive use of land and natural resources. Disruption from colonial activities such as encroachment on native land, war, disease, increased dependency on wage labor, and the reduction of native women’s subsistence contribution from economic to domestic production resulted in less time and fewer resources for economic activities such as basket weaving.

The influence of European colonists on Coastal Algonquin gender roles and basket technology

The introduction of Western technology and economic systems, along with war and disease, disrupted native communities and native women’s kinship structures eventually destroying gender-based social relations of production during the historic contact stage of colonization. Native women were forced “to sever the vital connection they had to the soil as its principal cultivator and nurturers” (O’Brien 323) and they lost their traditional positions of subsistence production and control of distribution. “Reducing the status of Indian women within their nations was a task that European colonizers were eager to undertake in order to weaken and destabilize indigenous societies” (Richmond and Den Ouden 183); furthermore, European gendered modes of labor and economic distribution undermined native
European influences during the contact period emphasized the importance of male productive contribution in the trading cycle, while simultaneously reducing the value of subsistence and material goods’ produced by Native women in order to establish the development of the nuclear family as the basic economic unit. By the early eighteenth century, native people in southern New England had endured colonization for 150 years and many indigenous communities had been rendered landless, while others were confined to reservations (Richmond and Den Ouden 184). The creation of private property and the nuclear family as the property-owning and inheriting unit meant that male household heads exclusively controlled land licenses and deeds, which excluded women from owning property. Native women were also almost totally excluded from the sphere of social production and were confined to domestic labor, which in the eyes of the dominate Euro-American culture “liberated” native women from back-breaking work while simultaneously relegating them to an ideological position of economic subordination (Gonzalez 126). Euro-American colonial institutions pressured native men to become agricultural laborers tending crops, while native women were trained in Euro-American domestic skills such as knitting, spinning, and weaving cloth (Richmond and Den Ouden 184; Grumet 124). The emphases on the nuclear family unit, male ownership of private property, and sex defined labor tasks created independent, rather than interdependent, sex division of labor in which native women become economically subordinate (Gonzalez 126; Anderson 48).

By the late seventeenth century Euro-American social, gender, and economic pressures from colonists, settlers, and government agents seemed, on the surface, to
successfully alter many Algonquin communities social structure to reflect those of the emerging dominate Euro-American culture; “most Indian individuals and families were incorporated into English communities, in small clusters that rendered Indians virtually invisible within the context of the dominant society” (O’Brien 320). Native communities were pushed and/or absorbed into an economic and gender structure based on nuclear family units with male leadership. During restructuring of native communities, whether through missionary efforts or government reservation and allotment policy, native men were deeded land and encouraged to engage in agricultural farming, while native women were instructed in domestic skills. However, many native men did not acclimate to agricultural work; perhaps because, culturally, tending crops was women’s work. In addition, overtime, many Indian landowners lost their property and entered the military service or the emerging whaling industry. Some native groups were rendered virtually invisible because they blended into the dominate culture; on the other hand, many native groups were living in the margins of Euro-American culture during the late 17th, through the 18th and into the early 19th century (Wolverton 341-361). Landless poverty, whether from military conquest in the seventeenth century, or from failure in the market economy in the eighteenth century, created a population of “wandering Indians” (O’Brien 327). This landless Indian population which emerged continued to depend upon extensive use of seasonal natural resources and engaged in a semi-sedentary life-way; likewise, some native groups resisted altering their traditional patterns and gender roles because communal values of sharing and reciprocity, along with the flexibility of their subsistence economy, was a characteristic of their nature.

A landless Indian population, which was predominately female, was accepted by the
dominate Euro-American society as natural because Indians previously engaged in a semi-sedentary life-way that was dependent upon extensive use of natural resources. However, this new transience was not necessarily kin-group sponsored movements with planned, deliberate ends, but rather, many of these “wandering Indians” had more in common with the European “strolling poor” (O’Brien 327) for which town fathers were required, by English law, to assist with poor relief. English Poor Law equipped governing officials with a set of principal instruments to manage the lives of desperately poor people which included ridding (“warned out”) the community of people who did not belong, indenture the poor into labor contracts with local residents, or poor relief which required a respectable town person to be responsible for the needy person (Herndon 187). Native women, whose lives as free people were circumscribed by economic vulnerability, were landless and poor and they were more often than not “warned out” of communities rather than given assistance (Herndon 186). Yet, resourcefulness and acts of reciprocity were/are characteristic of native women. There is a story about a native woman who begged a drink of milk from an English woman, then sat down by a river’s edge and wove a basket of inner tree bark, red and blue shreds from her blanket, and cornhusks. She returned to present the basket to the English woman (Rhode Island Historical Society 1842; Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh 121). The presentation of the basket for a drink of milk along with the fact that this story was documented perhaps reveals a sense of compassion and duty women may have felt for each other, as well as the characteristic commitment or responsibility native women retained for their economic independence.

In that respect, the production of traditional Indian crafts constituted a possibility for
women to remain important in the economy and maintain a traditional socioeconomic role even when they were landless (O’Brien 324); accordingly, for some native women this pattern of Indian wandering was also an accommodation strategy. The baskets native women were weaving during the 18th and 19th century were not the twined hemp bags or birch-bark containers of pre- and early contact time. Native weavers had incorporated wood splint basket technology to their list of skills and through their association with Euro-American immigrant populations developed basket forms that farmers and farmer’s wives found useful and necessary. Landless native weavers developed their seasonal migration patterns to include harvesting trees and weaving wood splint baskets which they then sold door-to-door during the summer months. In this manner the wood splint basket trade “became a means of subsistence and even resistance as their land and other traditional means of living were lost to European encroachment” (Wolverton 359) while also becoming an important economic industry. Even though their status as independent tradeswoman was reduced to indigent peddler, native women upheld a continuity of tradition that identified their culture and cultural authority throughout the process of colonization.

B. Colonization and trade among the Chinook Wasco-Wishram

Prior to contact with Euro-American explorers, traders, and settlers Wasco-Wishram tradeswomen maintained an important and influential status within their native communities independently of their relations to native men. The Wasco-Wishram communities within the Plateau region participated in a highly developed trade protocol which reflected relationships between traders at the local and distant level. The social dimensions of trade that took place
between native people were structured upon these partnerships and included the skills of tradeswomen who acquired wealth through the trade of salmon, roots, and berries with surrounding native communities, as well as more remote native people traveling through the area on the Columbia River.

Trading partnerships included “friend partners” in local areas or in neighboring tribes, and this trade or exchange among kin and friends was characterized by “general reciprocity” in which kin or friends could freely borrow goods from each other, trade them, and reciprocate with the best items traded. Trade with distant tribes or friendly neighbors followed a pattern of “balanced reciprocity” which was a fair, but more impersonal calculation of trade values. Finally, exchanges with native people further removed, such as non-marriageable groups or groups in which intermittent warfare was waged, could become volatile, taking on characteristics of trickery, bluff, or force and this was considered “negative reciprocity” (Stern 647-658). These highly developed trade relationships, whether friendly and balanced or distant and argumentative, reflect the manner in which trade was viewed as an institution between people of the Mid-Columbia and Plateau, and in this economic institution Wasco-Wishram tradeswomen maintained central roles and relationships with trading partners, including distant peoples. For both men and women, expanding trade opportunities and strengthening commercial relations was often the reason for developing personal relationships; nevertheless, trade protocol also included trade between rivals who could expect hard bargaining in which the haggling experience of the trader was tested and could result in a handful of roots for a whole morning’s negotiations (Stern 649). In the same manner as men, women were in control of the trade value of their
surplus goods and created their own wealth through trade relationships and bargaining skills.

While the Wasco-Wishram occupied a location along the Columbia River which was a central travel and trade location, they also traveled inland toward the Plains to trade with other Native communities. Within these large trading excursions in which groups of men and women journeyed to visit their trading partners, women and wives helped carry goods and cared for the food; however, it was generally acknowledged that most of the goods traded were the property of the women (Stern 649).

The Mid-Columbia Wasco-Wishram were known throughout the greater Plateau region for their abundance in trade goods and development of peaceful trade relationships. Travel in and out of the region created well trodden routes and these “[t]rade routes here were eventually followed by foreign traders and explorers, some routes developed into major passages to the Northwest Coast or the Great Plains (Wright 159). International trade and subsequent colonization among the Wasco-Wishram didn’t take on the same form of drastic disruption that occurred within the Northeast among the Coastal Algonquin. For example, in Coastal Algonquin society the fur trade created a dependency on mercantile or industrial capital which contributed to their growing impoverishment and marginalization and this dependency fundamentally altered the conduct of native labor and exchange. In contrast, much of the change that took place in Wasco-Wishram economies prior to the reservation period only involved a replacement in technology. The Wasco-Wishram maintained access to their fishing and gathering grounds which slowed and lessened the impact of impoverishment and marginalization. They continued living well among themselves while learning to adjust to a continuous flow of Euro-American socioeconomic influences; such as fur traders and
trading posts, missionaries and churches, government agents and reservations.

Initially, early contact with European traders took place along the Northwest coastal region which meant that European trade items, as well as disease, made their way into Wasco-Wishram territory before the presence of European traders and explorers. As a result, some scholars suggest that disease epidemics swept through the region during the late eighteenth century leaving many villages abandoned by the time Lewis and Clark arrived (Mercer 14). While that may be true, Lewis and Clark still reported visiting bustling trading centers and seeing large stacks of sally bags full of dried and pulverized salmon ready for storage or trade (Stern 641). International trade and eventual colonization among the Wasco-Wishram seems to have unfolded in subtle waves which were initially felt as a shift in the way “trading partnerships” evolved and the Wasco-Wishram slowly lost status as the important people who occupied a key travel and trade location.

Early contact with trade goods from outside pre-contact trading partners first appear as the trickling in of European trade goods and disease from the northwest and the appearance of the horse from more eastern native groups which indicates that significant changes were occurring within trade relations before the arrival of the Whites (French 340). The stages of shifting trade influences in Wasco-Wishram culture are differentiated by the evidence of culture contact, such as the appearance of European trade goods and the horse, the arrival of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, fur traders, missionaries, the establishment of reservations and the development of industry and wage labor. The impact of culture contact among the Mid-Columbia River and Plateau area, and the Wasco-Wishram response to each new wave or shift in trade relationships, follows the general time themes of historical contact,
colonial era and industrial era, and these impacts and responses are discussed in terms of the changes in women’s trade relations and socioeconomic status, as well as in the changes in Wasco-Wishram basket technology. Transitional Period basket making technology of Wasco-Wishram tradeswomen was a response to the influx of new trade goods that could be incorporated into existing basket forms and this pattern persisted through colonial influences. When native women were relocated to reservations or opted to remain transient between seasonal locations or were assimilated into wage labor, their basket technology seems to have quickly entered a Hiatus Period as industrial goods and wage labor became more readily available.

Unlike the change in basket making forms that occurred with Coastal Algonquin basket technology, Wasco-Wishram weavers who continued to produce basketry during the Transitional Period and colonial cultural era maintained their traditional forms but expanded their use of materials and designs taking advantage of newly introduced cornhusks, pre-spun trade yarn, available burlap and cotton string, and commercial dyes. Whereas, Algonquin weavers were severed from their traditional gathering places as well as their agricultural fields which disrupted their seasonal activities and limited their ability to harvest basket making materials to produce birch bark or knee spun Indian hemp baskets. Instead they turned to a new basket form which required wood splints and developed a new market among Euro-American settlers. In contrast, Wasco-Wishram weavers incorporated new trade materials into their traditional sally bags and corn husk bags making more elaborate and colorful designs. The specific weaving construction of sally bags and corn husks bags remained the same; although overtime, the size of the bags constructed were reduced
reflecting a change in the amount of time weavers could dedicate to basket making, and new colors and designs were incorporated reflecting the use of colored trade yarn and new cultural symbols based on new activities and images from daily life. Baskets produced during the Transitional Period/colonial era were made more often for gift giving or ceremonial purposes and less for packaging subsistence food items for trade or storage and this is reflective of the shift in native women’s socioeconomic emphasis within their communities.

**Wasco-Wishram trade culture and changes in trade relations**

In Plateau culture, wealth was defined as having a surplus of trade items, as well as access to trade goods produced by other native communities. Accumulating materials such as whale meat, mussels, and dentalium shells from the Northwest Coast, along with Plains buffalo hides, Northwest Coast canoes, and handicrafts from other tribes within and outside the Plateau was believed to make life more convenient, more interesting, and luxurious (Ackerman 79). The introduction of the horse sometime between 1730 and 1750 enabled native women, and men, to travel to more distant tribes more often to accumulate more wealth and therefore maintain their position as the important tradespersons along the Columbia River. The horse itself also became a trade item and an indicator of wealth (French 358). Wasco-Wishram women, as well as men, could accumulate wealth in horses. While direct evidence for women owning and trading horses during pre- and early contact is not explicitly evident in the research of David French and Theodore Stern when discussing trade among the Mid-Columbia River region, they do offer clues to the role horses played in the
wide spread institution of trade and accumulation of wealth in the region. In his work on the Columbia River trade network Stern describes how the trade protocol and bargaining process proceeded during a trade in horses between men of two native Plateau communities; in addition, Stern describes the complicated status of Native women married to Euro-American men at a British post stating that “they were at once Indian and of the fort. As Indians, they could own horses and slaves, which their [Euro-American] husbands could not” (Stern 651). French notes that in general, early contact relations with Whites were transient and limited because the Whites wanted relatively little from the Wasco-Wishram and wanted to keep relations “peaceful and predictable.” Occasionally Whites employed native men and/or women or obtained articles from them, “sometimes they wanted horses to ride or to eat” (French 351). As a trade item and an indicator of wealth horses were available to both native men and women in the Plateau region; furthermore, as the research indicts, native women fully participated in this trade and by native standards were considered wealthier than their British spouse.

During this initial shift in culture contact and trade, Wasco-Wishram native communities were still largely engaged in trade with other native communities, all of whom operated within a well-understood system of rules regarding the security of their property and trade goods (French 344). When difficulties arose, the Wasco-Wishram preferred to negotiate over issues rather than fight; the act of negotiation served to maintain their initial understanding of the nature of relationships as one of bargaining, in contrast to one of conflict. Negotiating and bargaining were intellectual skills, as well as an egalitarian social feature.
In the late eighteenth century, trade goods from, and information about, maritime fur traders reached the interior Wasco-Wishram and prepared them for the appearance of White people (French 340-341). As a result, when the Wasco-Wishram came into contact with fur traders and the Lewis and Clark expedition, these newcomers were treated in much the same manner as members of other Indian groups who came to visit and trade. During this initial contact following the Lewis and Clark visit (1805), practically all contact with Euro-Americans was with travelers connected in one way or another with the fur trade. The first permanent trading post in the region was founded in 1811 at the mouth of the Columbia River, and early relations with fur traders and explorers were fairly benign. Subsequent fur companies established trading posts further up the Columbia River near Wasco-Wishram trading centers and fishing sites and initially the native community welcomed the establishment of posts in their vicinity. Euro-American traders wanted to establish good relations with the Wasco-Wishram; however, they weren’t very interested in their trade goods other than food, canoes, and horses. Euro-American traders felt they paid a high price for salmon, root cakes, berries and such while the Wasco-Wishram felt they received trifling payment for the assistance they offered in portaging and other services (French 351). Likewise, the Wasco-Wishram felt they didn’t received trade goods in substantial quantity; Native communities on the river’s portage worked to prevent certain European goods, such as weapons from passing up river. Subsequently, the introduction of European firearms exacerbated rivalries and competition among native communities and the Wasco-Wishram were often attacked by other native groups. In the meantime, the Wasco-Wishram began to experience the impersonal behavior which dominated British post society. For example,
British sentiments of class and race were hierarchical, their attitude toward trade was mercantilist and they insisted on a highly rationalized view of life. From the Native perspective the post was stingy with its wealth of goods even though kin relationships developed through intermarriage with Euro-American traders and native women; the post didn’t respond to native expectations of generalized reciprocity. As a result of inequitable trade practices and post societies’ impersonal behavior, a feeling of negative reciprocity emerged within the trade relations between Euro-Americans and the Wasco-Wishram. While in the past trading relationships, particularly between marriageable kin groups, was a festive affair where everyone took pride in facilitating a good exchange, the introduction of Euro-American post society and their developing commercialism resulted in a shift in trade relations toward competition and conflict.

When Methodist missionaries arrived at The Dallas around 1838 the Wasco-Wishram felt compelled to co-operate with them as they did with the fur traders. The missionaries’ major concern was primarily with “civilizing” the Indians and they focused on the manners and ways of native women. Euro-American missionaries perceived Plateau women as “haughty and independent” because they owned the food they gathered. The missionaries observed how easy it was for the women to obtain a surplus of wild foods and other resources for trade and exchange it for everything they needed including horses (Ackerman 77). Previous and similar observations were made by Meriwether Lewis when he noted that Native women were treated with more equality because they contributed equally within the community, their judgment and opinions were respected, and their advice in matters of trade was asked and followed (Smits 49). The difference in tone between Lewis’s observations and
the missionaries’ perceptions could be their distinct different objectives in visiting and observing native communities in contrast to living among native communities and instilling western patriarchal values. In order to civilize the Indians the missionaries had to rationalize imposing Euro-American hegemony on native communities by associating certain native practices with savagism. In missionary eyes, civilized ladies were ladies of leisure who concerned themselves with domestic affairs, not hard working tradeswomen engaged in active bargaining. In addition, the missionaries deplored polygyny, they were continually frustrated that native women didn’t learn “Christian subordination”, and the missionaries noticed that native women held a great deal of informal political influence (Ackerman 77). Meanwhile, the missionaries hired native men to paddle canoes for them, as guides for overland trips, and as porters, hunters and message carriers. Native men were paid with tobacco or clothing; however, by the 1840’s they were beginning to ask for “dollars” (French 351). Missionaries entered the Columbia River Plateau culture at a time when they were ineffective in creating major change because there was no dire need for native communities to become assimilated; nevertheless, the missionaries represented another Euro-American influence that the Wasco-Wishram had to adjust to and learn to navigate around. The Wasco-Wishram worked at maintaining peaceful relations with the missionaries while not substantially altering their traditional culture.

The change initiated by the fur traders and missionaries among the Wasco-Wishram was gradual and felt in shifts, unlike the severe disruption felt among the Coastal Algonquin. Wasco-Wishram basket technology also absorbed the introduction of trade goods in a gradual manner which led to a Transitional Period shortly after contact rather than a Hiatus Period as
with the Coastal Algonquin. The beginning of this Transition Period can be seen in the incorporation of corn husks in the storage bags of the Wasco-Wishram. Corn was introduced as a food crop by the fur traders and missionaries in the early nineteenth century and the husks of the ears of corn were one the earliest "new" materials that became available to the Mid-Columbia weavers (Schlick 59) signifying the beginning of the Transitional Period in Wasco-Wishram basket technology. Pre-contact Plateau weavers twined large flat storage “sacks” of knee-spun Indian hemp and they used a false embroidery technique to decorate the sacks. The soft inside husks of corn were easy to dye and began to replace native grass as the decorative element in the flat bags of the Wishram and the bags became known as “corn-husk” bags. Initially, the patterns on the flat bags were decorated with geometric stepped designs within the design area of the bag; however, with the introduction of corn husks and subsequently colored woolen yarn, the decoration of the Wishram twined bags evolved to cover the entire bag in false embroidery and the designs became more elaborate and colorful. (see Fig 3 and Fig 4)

The corn husk bag in Figure 3 reflects similar features of twined weave technique, geometric stepped design, and hemp fiber material as the much earlier Algonquin “Yohicake” bag in Figure 1, as well as the Wasco sally bag in Figure 2 collected by Lewis and Clark. While Figure 3 incorporates corn husks, which was a new material introduced early in the colonial era by Euro-American fur traders and missionaries to the Plateau region, the style of weave and design indicate that at the time the corn husk bag was made Plateau women were still working closely within their pre-contact environment and engaged in subsistence activities which allowed for access to natural resources and leisure time to create
intricate patterns on a standard size bag. The subtleness of the colors and geometric design invokes a connection with the natural world, a sense that if the bag were left behind on a grass river bank or in a field where roots were freshly gathered, the bag would blend in and perhaps be overlooked. In contrast, while the corn husk bag in Figure 4 is made with the same twined technique and base material of Indian hemp, the design pattern invokes a completely different sense of the weavers’ daily life and response to cultural contact. The bag in Figure 4 reveals that the weaver had more access to trade goods such as string, colored yarn and leather, and was more engaged in cultural activities that reflected contact with Euro-American settlers and distant native groups.

**Basket technology and new trade goods**

During colonial cultural contact (1750-1858), the number of Euro-Americans visiting and settling in the region increased and the character of Euro-Americans continued to change. For example, after the explorers, fur traders, and missionaries arrived, settlers and miners followed and by the early industrial era (1858-1920) Wasco-Wishram culture experienced increases in stress, war, and skirmishes. While the Wasco-Wishram chose to sit out skirmishes under the close surveillance of the white agents and felt they were safe as long as they stayed in camp at The Dallas, they also realized that their traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, and trading culture was ceasing to function as it had in the past. The Wasco-Wishram believed that life as they had known it could no longer continue or be maintained through their own efforts. The Indian groups in the Plateau experienced cultural crisis in
various degrees. This cultural crisis was not necessarily complete personal or cultural
disruption or disorganization as experienced by the Coastal Algonquin, but rather a shared
feeling that one’s own culture is going change, and when reservation treaties were proposed
to the Wasco-Wishram in 1855 many signed on without great opposition. “The treaty-
 signing, the neutrality during the war, and the move to the reservations indicated that the
Whites were no longer viewed as a visiting Indian group” (French 354), but rather that the
Whites had to be taken into account in regard to how the Wasco-Wishram continued to
define themselves as the important people.

The reservation era separated the Wasco from the Wishram. The Wasco moved south
to the Warm Springs Reservation in 1858, while the Wishram moved north to the Yakima
Reservation. Government policy was basically the same on both reservations and Wasco and
Wishram activities during this era generally reflect each other. At the Warm Springs
Reservation the Wasco initially settled close to the agency in traditional multifamily
“longhouses.” However, the reservation agents continued the missionaries pattern of
imposing Euro-American hegemony and patriarchal values on the reservation by insisting the
Indians practice “industrious use of land” (French 383). At the urging of the agency they
broke into families and moved on to small plots of land and around the 1880’s native men
began to clear extensive farms or ranches raising grain, hay, and livestock while native
women were encouraged to learn domestic work and focus on the running of the household.
The Wasco were fairly successful as farmers or ranchers. Where the soil was good and crops
grew, they did well; however, they didn’t really like it. The Wasco were fishermen and each
spring they returned to the Columbia to harvest fish. Initially the agents accepted the
Wasco’s seasonal need to return to the Columbia for the seasonal salmon runs; however, in an effort to increase the success of the Wasco farming operations and/or take over the prime fishing sites along the Columbia, the agents renegotiated a second treaty in 1865 limiting freedom of movement and relinquished Wasco fishing rights. Nevertheless, many Wasco largely ignored the treaty and continued to fish on the Columbia building temporary fishing camps at their traditional family sites.

The Warm Springs Reservation was accessible to the root-digging and berry-picking areas on one-day horseback trips or on foot which meant Wasco women could continue their subsistence activities gathering roots and berries. The continuing flow of Euro-American trade goods offered Wasco women alternative material to use for weaving their traditional sally bags, as well as alternative uses for Euro-American by-products. For example, large burlap bags began to replace the larger, time consuming root gathering bags previously woven by Wasco weavers. In contrast, weavers continued to produce the smaller, less time consuming “sally bags” used for berry picking, although they began to incorporate corn husks, pre-spun yarn, imported raffia, and commercial string such as hop twine. Hop yards were introduced in the Yakima Valley in 1871 and many Warm Springs Indians traveled to work in the hop yards at the end of the huckleberry season. Euro-American growers grew hops on cotton twine strung on high trellises. At the end of the season the strings were cut down, the blossoms were picked and baled in large burlap bags and shipped to breweries. The remaining thousands of yards of string were balled up by Native women to take home for their winter’s basket making. The cotton string was incorporated into sally bags and flat twined bags produced during the Transitional Period; however, the distinctive basket form
and design patterns of the Wasco sally bag largely remained the same. This supply of string, as well as the opportunity for harvest work, ended in the early twentieth century with the introduction of a picking machine that chopped up the twine, vine, and leaves. The ramping up of the industrial age, as marked by the improved harvesting technology of hops, eliminated many wage labor opportunities for native women. Industrialization often resulted in alienating native women from the labor market and capitalist development resulted in an unequal exchange with native economies and laborers. Mechanization replaced laborers and companies didn’t hire native women for more skilled work they believed native women couldn’t perform or were otherwise not suited for.

The continuity in form and design of the sally bags is reflective of the continuity of Wasco and Wishram women’s status in the face of Euro-American influences which attempted to reduce their socioeconomic position. Whether Wasco and Wishram native communities remained on the reservation or continued to migrate seasonally between their reservation farms, gathering grounds and fish sites, the socioeconomic role of women within their native communities remained intact. Wasco and Wishram women remained the primary suppliers of food and income for their families and communities. To the annoyance of government agents, the Wasco and Wishram continued to insist on distributing their rations, wage income, and subsistence goods at the extended family and community level and women maintained their roles as good providers with strong economic skills. While Wasco and Wishram women were subjected to oppressive Euro-American gender standards by receiving lower wages for labor and no title for land, within their native community they continued to hold important political influence. The few sally bags and corn husk bags produce during this
time were a blend of new materials within a traditional construction reflecting how Native women adapted to outside influences while maintaining the important positions they held within their own culture.

**Part III. The emerging wage/market economy and changes in basketry among two Native American communities.**

The wage labor and capitalistic market economy that evolved out of colonialism disadvantaged Native American communities through structures of competition and individualism, and native women lost their independent tradeswoman status. Colonial institutions appropriated Indian resources, exploited Indian labor, and dominated Indian lives. Native communities were pushed out of their traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, and agricultural areas by the ever increasing and encroaching European population; meanwhile, Indian populations were depleted through warfare with whites as well as other Indians, and through epidemics and starvation. In general, by the mid-1800’s, most Native American communities where coerced into signing treaties and corralled onto reservations by white government agents who also limited their mobility and ability to maintain a subsistence culture and traditional existence (Jorgensen 2). Kin group subsistence contribution and distribution of food was discouraged while reservation agents insisted on nuclear family units to whom land and government commodities could be rationed. Training in the form of marketable skills was available to native men who were then encouraged to enter the labor market or farm their allotment acres. The expansion of wage labor opportunities dichotomized male-female labor patterns and also created asymmetrical contribution of
production. Native men were more able to increase their contribution to the nuclear family economic base through wage labor opportunities while native women were confined to domestic labor, handicraft work and some subsistence activity (Gonzales 125; Wright 533). In the eyes of government agents, missionaries, and the emerging dominate white society the productive contribution of native women was considered a domestic contribution which fell under the supervision of male household heads. In this socioeconomic system native men sought wage work as laborers in any number of developing industries centered on appropriating natural resources, such as timber men, whale men, miners, and agricultural laborers. Meanwhile, native women earned low wages as household servants or factory workers. Their role as important agricultural or subsistence tradeswomen was no longer available to them because they no longer had access to their gardens, gathering grounds, or a fair market. As a result, native women were more likely to live in poverty and in the margins of the dominate white society because, in this new patriarchal and colonial structure of authority, they had very limited opportunities to earn a living (French 381; Herndon 188; Wright 533, 534).

During the mid-19th century a new market economy was introduced for some native communities through the invention of the locomotive and railroad, the development of tourism and resort areas, and large agriculture farms. Along with the development of the railroad and tourists destinations and resort areas, a concern for the “vanishing Indian” - “the idea that the Indian way of life was about to be swept away in the onslaught of modernity” (Herzog 69) was building among the emerging Euro-American industrial middle class. One response to this concern was to collect Native American cultural artifacts, particularly
bASKETRY, FOR HOME DECORATION AND PUBLIC EXHIBITS. “THIS PREVALENT CULTURAL ATTITUDE [AMONG THE WHITE MIDDLE CLASS] REFLECTED WHAT WAS [CONSIDERED] THE INEVITABLE OUTCOME OF THE CONFINEMENT OF INDIANS TO RESERVATIONS AND THE INTENSIFIED EFFORTS TO ASSIMILATE THEM INTO DOMINANT AMERICAN SOCIETY” (HERZOG 69-70). THIS PREVALENT CULTURAL ATTITUDE COINCIDED WITH A SURGE IN RESORT AND TOURIST TRAVEL AMONG MIDDLE CLASS WHITE SOCIETY AS THEY LEFT THE DEVELOPING INDUSTRIAL AREAS FOR RUSTIC EXPERIENCES IN THE RURAL AMERICAN LANDSCAPE. MANY INDIVIDUALS IN THIS EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS LAMENTED THE “VANISHING INDIAN” CULTURE WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY RALLYING AGAINST THE NEW INDUSTRIAL AGE AND THE STERILITY OF ITS MACHINE-MADE OBJECTS. AS A RESULT THEY EMBRACED THE INDIVIDUAL CRAFTSMAN, PARTICULARLY NATIVE AMERICAN BASKET WEAVERS, WHOM THEY FELT REPRESENTED A “SENSE OF TIMELESS CONTINUITY AND CONNECTION WITH AN ANCIENT PAST” (HERZOG 82). OTHER INDIVIDUALS FROM THE EMERGING MIDDLE CLASS WERE SIMPLY ESCAPING THE GROWING, CONGESTED URBAN AREAS AND ENJOYING A TRIP TO THE COUNTRY WHERE THEY PURCHASED AN INDIAN HANDICRAFT AS A MEMENTO. IN ADDITION TO COLLECTORS AND TOURISTS WHO DESIRED NATIVE HANDICRAFTS, AGRICULTURAL FARMERS NEEDED WORK BASKETS FOR HARVESTING CROPS, HAULING SUPPLIES, STORAGE, AND NUMEROUS OTHER TASKS. NATIVE WEAVERS RESPONDED TO THESE NEEDS BY PRODUCING A BASKET FORM TO SUIT EACH MARKET DEMAND WHICH ALSO ENABLED THEM TO CONTINUE, ON SOME LEVEL, TO PRACTICE MANY OF THEIR TRADITIONAL CULTURAL TRAITS, SUCH AS SUBSISTENCE MIGRATION PATTERNS, COOPERATIVE LABOR PRODUCTION, AND BASKET TECHNOLOGY.

THE ABILITY OF NATIVE WEAVERS TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS NEW MARKET FOR INDIAN BASKETS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF NATIVE WOMEN VARIED. COASTAL AND NORTHEAST ALGONQUIN BASKET TECHNOLOGY ENTERED A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD IN WHICH A NEW TECHNIQUE AND FORMS WERE DEVELOPED TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF FARMERS AND TOURISTS. AT THE SAME TIME
Algonquin basket technology entered this highly productive Transitional Period, Algonquin women were marginalized, worked for low wages as domestic servants, and generally lived in poverty. On the other hand, basket technology among the Wasco-Wishram entered a Hiatus Period in which fewer and fewer weavers produced fewer and fewer baskets, yet they held onto their traditional techniques and forms. Wasco-Wishram women were able to continue gathering and trading roots and berries at an intertribal level while maintaining important roles within their native community; however, like Algonquin women they were also marginalized within the dominate Euro-American culture. The baskets produced by the Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram communities during this stage of colonization represent both socioeconomic ingenuity as well as a resistance to complete acculturation.

A. Euro-American collectors and Indian weavers among the Coastal Algonquin

The emerging capitalist market economy that evolved with the increasing development of Euro-American society simultaneously ended traditional methods of subsistence production while opening the door for participation in a cash economy through wage labor or production of marketable goods. Wood splint basket technology and door to door peddling was one Algonquin response to these socioeconomic changes. “The development of basket production for markets in growing villages and the appearance of peddling and commissioned work were all part of the historical process of redefining the relations between native society, native basket makers, and others” (Handsman and McMullen 23). In some areas of the Northeast, among some Algonquin communities, wood splint basket technology was organized into an industry with groups of basket makers
constructing large numbers of specific basket forms which were resold to wholesale
catalogues or the public through a distributor. In other areas, among other Algonquin
communities, making and selling wood splint baskets was a seasonal activity in which basket
makers peddled their baskets door to door. Overtime, with the development of resort areas
and tourism, basket makers traveled to established resort areas to camp and sell baskets
during the summer months. Some basket makers who traveled to tourist and resort areas
developed unique forms and personalized styles which created a demand for their specific
baskets (Handsman and McMullen 27-28). While unique forms and personalized basket
styles reflected a developing sense of individualism within a community which previously
emphasized collective and cooperative economic strategies, in regions where access to land
was restricted or denied or where few steady wage employment opportunities existed, the
income gained, as well as the continuity of tradition expressed through basket making,
encouraged and provided opportunities for other native basket makers.

Native weavers who peddled baskets door to door were a visible presence in contrast
to those Indians who acculturated or converted into the dominate Euro-American society as
farmers, plumbers, washerwomen, shoemakers, domestic servants, or any number of other
skilled occupations. While native basket peddlers lived on the margins of Euro-American
society, as opposed to assimilated Indians who blended and fit in, they were highly visible as
Indians, as the poor of the village, and as wanderers. In contrast to Indians who assimilated
and developed Euro-American sociocultural traits, peddlers often exhibited qualities the
dominate culture considered intemperate, immoral, drunken, or childlike. Indian peddlers
were often colorful individuals around whom local legend and folklore was created; equally
important, as an economic strategy, colorful Indian peddlers may have exploited and reinforced the prejudices Euro-Americans held about them. Nevertheless, “[b]asket-making stood outside both the agricultural and the new manufacturing economy, [and] it offered a kind of independence not available to wage laborers” (Ulrich 56). Basket making and peddling allowed native weavers to live close to the land, develop alternate forms of subsistence patterns, and to move freely with the seasons. In addition, native basket-makers and peddlers continued to engage in “Indian Work,” work defined by Indians as the “work we do and want to continue doing.” These Indians assumed the right to proceed on the land and water to satisfy their subsistence needs “as was their custom,” a claim guaranteed to all Atlantic peoples by the treaty of 1725 (McFeat 66; Wolverton 360). In native eyes, natural resources such as ash trees were available to those who used them to gain a livelihood, regardless if the trees grew within the fenced property of a white owner.

Early in the 19th century utilitarian baskets such as covered storage baskets, harvesting baskets, and work baskets were in demand by non-Indian consumers. Marginalized Native American craftspeople produced large numbers of baskets used by Yankee farmers for storing and transporting a wide variety of products. Yankee farmers and their wives needed a large variety and number of everyday utilitarian baskets which were among the most common objects essential to everyday economies in New England households (MacDougall 170; Wolverton 360); nevertheless, the cost the farmers paid for these baskets, which were labor intensive to produce, averaged in the cents (MacDougall 167; Wolverton 341). For example, in 1800 Native weaver Molly Hatchett was paid four cents for one of her baskets and Sarah Cooper received 16 to 48 cents for her baskets,
depending on their size (Wolverton 346). In 1846 Truman Mauwee sold a basket for 50 cents and the same farmer paid 25 cents to Elihu and Jacob Mauwee for their baskets (McMullen 143). In the early 1800s farming was still a major occupation in the northeast; however, commercial industries and factories began to appear and many farmers left their farm jobs for promises of riches in the factories. As a means of comparison with income earned from peddling baskets, in general, in the 1800s, the average wage earner made $16.00 a week, while workers in some trades made between $2.00 to $6.00 a week. In the late 1800s the average American factory employee worked 12-hour days, seven days a week to earn a basic living making between 5 cents and 20 cents an hour: A women working in a clothing factory earned 6 cents for each shirt she made. A bag of flour cost $1.80 per pound, one quart of milk was 56 cents, one pound of coffee was 35 cents, 2 bushels of coal was $1.36 and one week’s rent was $4.00 (gometaldetecting.com). The price per basket native weavers made may or may not have supplemented other income. Native peddlers may have earned a comparable income through basket peddling; however, they were still engaged in subsistence living which included harvesting natural resources and selling stores of baskets at seasonal resorts.

To increase sales many Native peddlers often hand-painted or stamped designs such as vases with flowers on their baskets to appeal to Euro-American senses. Such designs were often taken from other forms of decorative arts in Yankee households. At the same time, some weavers also incorporated traditional Indian motifs such as the stockade design and juxtaposed two cultural designs on the same basket. Commercial pigments were available to basket weavers from 1630 on and many Native weavers also included stain from walnut husks and butternuts. Older designs include tribal color preferences and such baskets were
seldom decorated with more than two colors (McMullen 107). Color was applied to splints using a swab, brush, or stamp. Wood splint basket designs and application technique often reveal the family or cultural affiliation of the weaver, or may reflect individual style. These differences are usually revealed through small technical details such as the splint width size, particular forms, or the grouping of swabbed, painted, or stamped designs and colors. In some cases, through shape and design, wood splint basketry provided a means of maintaining cultural identity while also providing a marketable commodity for needed income. In this way, the past was preserved through the genealogies constructed with baskets (McMullen 114). In other cases the increase color and variability of wood splint basket forms and designs throughout some Algonquin areas simply represented the weaver’s desire to increase sales by appealing to buyer’s preferences.

Later, toward the 1870’s when seashore and mountain resort areas in New England opened, wood splint fancy baskets were made for sale. The development of resort areas and tourist traffic eliminated the need for itinerant peddling in some New England areas as weavers spent the winter months weaving and stock piling a large supply of baskets which they then brought with them in the summer and sold while they camped near resorts areas. The development of fancy baskets coincides with the use of blocks and gauges which helped make quality fancy baskets in uniform shapes while speeding up production. Blocks were used for shaping baskets, producing a larger quantity of quality baskets of the same shape in a timely manner, in addition to weaving new shapes that appealed to Euro-American buyers. Gauges were used for cutting splint weavers into uniform widths. Several sizes of narrow weavers were used for fancy baskets while wider weavers were used in utilitarian baskets.
Large work baskets had been produced in New England for at least the previous two hundred years using a specially designed “crooked knife,” jackknife, straight-blade or drawknife which created irregular splint widths. Early baskets can be identified by this irregular quality. When “crooked knives” were used to cut splint widths, fancy baskets were a novelty and made infrequently.

Quantities of fancy baskets began to be produced more toward the 1870s with the increased use of blocks and gauges and as a market for them appeared among the urban tourists visiting the increasing number of summer resorts. (see Fig 5 and Fig 6) The lidded storage basket in Figure 5 was made early in the 19th century; the splints are evenly cut suggesting the introduction of a gauge rather than the use of a “crooked knife.” Black and faded reddish design elements are painted on the wide splints; the use of dots as a decorative outline is particular to the Nipmuck while the circular lid is of the “closed Paugusset” construction (Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh 115). The differing cultural influences in this basket represents how contact between regional Native communities influenced weaving technique and design. In contrast to the utilitarian features of Figure 5, the Mohegan wall basket in Figure 6 is considered a fancy basket. It was made around 1875-1900; the interplay of wide and narrow splints defines the decorative horizontal banding while two varieties of “porcupine twist,” along with swabbed red, blue, and green wefts increase the baskets decorative and display value. Figure 5 and 6 reflect native weavers resourceful adaptation and economic strategy as they constructed baskets to meet the shift in the Euro-American market from farming to tourism; while many baskets were still functional the decorative and display value was enhanced.
Native weavers made fancy baskets to appeal to the Euro-American Victorian sense of ornate decoration. While the earlier utilitarian storage baskets were modeled after hat boxes and bandboxes used by Euro-American tourists, Indian weavers adopted other fancier forms which they imitated from items tourists used such as glove boxes, napkin rings, scissor cases, creamers, creels, collar boxes and brush cases. These smaller, portable splint forms were made and decorated with elegant handles, decorative weaves, dyed splints, and sweet grass to appeal to the Victorian fondness for elaboration (Prins and McBride 9; Lester 39-59). Native weavers displayed remarkable ingenuity in their ability of produce these new basket shapes which appealed to tourists’ sense of convenience and novelty, and many weavers development long term relationships with tourist who returned to the same resort area year after year.

Wood splint basket technology among the Algonquin opened a new market for weavers and provided an additional source of income, it permitted Algonquin communities throughout the Northeast and tidewater regions to continue some traditional activities that supported their identity as Indians, and it resulted in unique changes between native men and women. In the past native men and women in egalitarian communities held separate yet complementary roles in which major tasks, such as, clearing agricultural fields, building fishing weirs, and harvesting and preparing subsistence food items for winter storage were performed cooperatively. In this separate yet complementary system, native men and women maintained their own technological knowledge; individuals made and owned their tools and possessed the resources and skills to replace them.

During the 19th century wood splint basket technology became an economic
adaptation of a traditional women’s tool in which native men and women shared technological knowledge. Basket making was included in the category of “Indian work” (McFeat 65) and “Indian work” was equated with cultural survival. In general Native men chopped and harvested ash trees and using an axe pounded the tree rings loose. With a “crooked knife” men then cut splints from the wood and then reduced the thickness of the splints to the many sizes need for the variety of baskets the women would weave. Native men also constructed rims and handles, and in time built the blocks or molds which were used for making uniform shapes. Native men were involved in weaving work baskets while native women primarily dyed or painted splints, wove an array of utilitarian baskets but where the primary weavers of fancy baskets. Both men and women sold baskets, either as peddlers or as part of a family or group of weavers working through a shop/distributor or at the tourist resorts.

While native men took an active role in the construction and marketing of baskets they were also contributing to an industry which evolved, in part, as a way of resisting Euro-American pressures of dichotomized male-female labor patterns. For Native men and women in the basket industry concepts of work remained vested in traditional meanings of community ritual and as a result, women’s contribution remained important. Separate yet complementary work patterns in which men and women shared major tasks evolved into a cooperative basket making industry in which both men and women participated in equally important ways. In keeping with the structure of egalitarianism, the entire native community benefited through the development of a market for and income from Indian baskets; but perhaps most importantly in the long run, basket making function as a continuity of tradition
which enabled native communities to maintain their identity.

**B. Euro-American collectors and Indian weavers among the Chinook Wasco and Wishram.**

During the early part of the 19th century Plateau women continued to engage in some subsistence activities. They dug a considerable amount of edible roots and gathered berries and they continued to participate in harvesting and storing salmon; however, by this time the missionaries also provided seeds and instructions for the cultivation of corn and potatoes around 1838, and by the 1840’s a few cattle were being raised by Wasco and Wishram ranchers (French 348-349). Nevertheless, salmon remained an important trade item and staple food, salmon was still fished from the river using scaffolds and nets, as well as seining and spearing. In addition, hunting continued as a secondary activity which provided food and skins for bedding and clothing. For the most part, labor production and contribution remained complementary. Women and men continued to contribute equally to the needs of the community and each of their contributions were equally valued. The white newcomers offered the Indians a variety of intermittent wage work as labors or domestic servants; however the Wasco and Wishram were unsatisfactory employees largely because they didn’t fully understand the role of employee to employer and they were not accustomed to extended contractual relationships (French 348-351).

While increasing numbers of white newcomers infiltrated the Plateau area in a series of waves and shifts, the Native communities began to sense that their culture was going to change and this resulted in a feeling of cultural crisis. “The existence of such a crisis does not imply the presence of “disorganization” on either a personal or a cultural level. The integrity
of behavioral systems is not necessarily disturbed either by changes in interpretations of them or by the appearance of alternative systems” (French 363). In other words, the Wasco and Wishram communities were not as severely disrupted and decimated as the Northeastern and Coastal Algonquin during their historic contact and colonial period; rather the Wasco and Wishram had to continually adjust to new influences and decide the best manner to affect change. Unlike the Algonquin, the Wasco and Wishram could continue to rely on subsistence food, inter-and-intratribal kin relationships, along with a level of trade which kept them from becoming entirely marginalized and destitute. Even after their removal to reservations, the Wasco and Wishram managed to maintain social behavioral patterns within their native community which prevented internal disorganization. Existing modes of production and contribution remained relatively the same which allowed the Wasco and Wishram to continue living, on some level, in the same manner they traditional had. Nevertheless, reservation agents and administrators were single-minded in their insistence on acculturation and “civilizing” the Wasco and Wishram and although many Wasco and Wishram were successful as farmers or ranchers; as a whole, they preferred to fish, to migrate seasonally, and to live in a complementary manner.

While some Wasco and Wishram groups moved on to the reservations assigned for them and cooperated with the agents who urged them to develop farming skills and acculturate to Euro-American standards of civilization, other Wasco and Wishram groups refused to be confined to the reservations and give up their traditional manner of living. Federal officials complained that this group of mid-Columbia Indians denied belonging to any single reservation or recognized tribe, they “remained at large on the public domain,”
and refused to abandon their traditional village sites, cemeteries, and fishing stations. “By the 1880s, the government had labeled them “Columbia River Indians,” a term describing both an official category for renegades and a potential tribal identity (Fisher 470). Kinship ties and exchange relationships between the two groups continued to tie reservation and non-reservation natives to each other; however, differences did develop in which the non-reservation Indians began to see themselves as more authentically Indian. The Columbia River Indians insisted on living outside the lines that marked reservation territory and resisted having their identity defined by the emerging colonial culture.

This manner of living outside the emerging colonial culture and maintaining traditional cultural activities is a trait the Wasco and Wishram Indians, who were a part of the Columbia River Indian community, held in common with Algonquin basket peddlers of the Northeast and demonstrates the importance some native groups or communities put on maintaining their identity as Indians. Like the Algonquin who exhibited qualities the dominate culture considered uncivilized and who exploited and reinforced Euro-American prejudices, the Columbia River Indians developed and embraced a renegade status in an effort to retain their traditional culture and continued their subsistence activities in an egalitarian manner for as long as they could.

The government and reservation agents attempted to create a reservation and classification system involving all the different Columbia River native communities which it could comprehend and control, yet the native communities along the Columbia River historically belonged to and traveled among an intertribal social network developed through incomprehensible trade and kin relationships. For the native communities along the
Columbia River, boundaries were arbitrary; therefore, geographical confinement was not readily accepted. Likewise, treaty agreements were understood by the native communities to guarantee their rights to harvest traditional foods at “usual and accustomed places” on and off the reservations (Fisher 473). While reservation agents and government policy interpreted treaty agreements differently and attempted to enforce stability as well as a population census, many Mid-Columbia Indians continued to move freely between communities on and off the reservation where they had kin and refused to have their names listed on reservation roles. The reservation and its churches, schools, and agricultural farms represented institutions of federal and Euro-American power and control and embodied an assault on Native culture and identity which was in direct opposition to traditional “Indianness” and “Indian work” the renegades wanted to maintain. For a while native women within these native communities resistant to federal and social control were able to continue working in a complementary and equal fashion within their land base in activities such as basket weaving and subsistence gathering associated with their identity as Indians.

Consequently, toward the end of the 19th century the use of subsistence roots and berries began to decline as the purchase of foods, government rations, and garden produce were available as supplements and alternatives to the traditional diet (French 372). Fishing activity was concentrated on the big salmon runs in the spring and fall however the efficient Indian fishing complex was simply modified or supplemented by White cultural items. “For example, Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum* L.) was only gradually supplanted by European twine and net. Scaffolds were of the familiar shape, but nails and lumber were becoming available to aid in building” (French 373). The Wasco and Wishram emphasis on
maintaining the traditional form of the fishing weirs with a gradual replacement of certain native materials with selected European items reflects the insistence of the Wasco and Wishram on visiting and maintaining a presence at their traditional fishing sites. In addition to the importance of fishing sites in subsistence activities they were also cemetery sites; the places where the bones of their ancestors were buried. The burying of bones at fishing sites established family and kin rights to the sites while also associating fishing with ancestral ceremony; in that light, the use of traditional materials, such as hemp, in building fishing weirs continued a tradition and manner of honoring the ancestors. Even reservation Indians became insistent on reservation land belonging to them and being their permanent home place once their deceased were buried there (Fisher 484). The places where the bones of their ancestors were buried seems to have cemented the Wasco and Wishram to that particular place and this intense fixation with ancestral bones can also be seen in the persistence of the X-ray human figure as a basket design motif throughout the 19th century.

The X-ray, or exposed rib, human figure motif on round sally bags was common in the Northwest. Mid-Columbia River native communities were known to rebury the bones of their dead on or near their fishing sites where their ancestors could give blessings to living relatives and “[t]he exposed-rib designs could be one way for the early Wasco and Wishram weavers to depict their ancestors in their art” (Schlick 68). Motifs such as the full human figure with hexagonal faces and exposed ribs were passed down through generations of weavers and from tribe to tribe. Weavers often varied the arrangement or execution of design elements to produce a range of complex patterns; for example the hexagonal face motif was frequently repeated covering the entire bag and adaptations of the X-ray human figure and
hexagonal face appear on sally bags throughout the 19th century. At the same time, weavers could also chose from a variety of motifs and they most often varied the arrangement of design elements, rarely weaving two bags alike. (see Fig 7) In contrast to Algonquin fancy baskets made with the use of blocks and gauges to produce numerous baskets in a uniform shape to meet the demands of new Euro-American market, Wasco and Wishram sally bags and corn husk bags were made as gifts, for trade, or ceremonial purposes within the native community. While turn of century basket collectors did visit the Columbia River region, a Euro-American market was either not available to or not sought out by Wasco and Wishram weavers. To this end, Wasco and Wishram weavers used design elements from within their traditional culture in an arrangement to tell a story. “A collector from The Dallas in 1904 reported a weaver’s remarks about two bags. One bag recorded the story of a successful hunt while another bag was titled by the weaver “The Return of Spring.” (Schlick 66). Design arrangements depicting a successful hunt or the change in seasons captured activities from traditional daily life as well as the weavers’ sense of aesthetics.

As changes to the Wasco and Wishram socioeconomic culture continually unfolded during the 19th century, their bags’ designs also changed. While the baskets’ sally bag and corn husk bag forms remained the same, weavers began to leave behind the conventional motifs of earlier times; although, the x-ray human design appears to have persisted through the greater part of the 19th century, dying out afterwards. New designs included dark faces on human figures which may represent black men, and small solid figures of men with hats on their heads, not common before the 1800s, which may represent Euro-American newcomers. Likewise, the horse appears in Wasco-style weaving early in the 1800s, and cattle motifs
appeared on bags after the arrival of the missionaries in 1830s (see Fig 8). Other domestic animals such as pigs, chickens, and goats are worked into bags’ designs around 1856.

The need to make a living in a cash economy reduced the hours available for weaving; as a result, some weavers chose heavier, more readily available materials for their bags, such as commercial string, which enlarged the finer stitches made from Indian hemp. While the design elements and materials used to make the sally bags changed, the round form of the bags remained, as well as the arrangement of the designs which were orderly and static. Figures were woven in vertical columns, horizontal bands, or in the rare all-over pattern (Schlick 72). Younger turn-of-the-century bag makers chose to depict action scenes within the bags’ design; therefore, “what the bags lost in artistry, perhaps, they gained in realism, featuring designs that appear to represent rodeo scenes (left bag in Figure 8), fish-spearing, a Wasco dance, and other activities” (Schlick 72). More traditional scenes such as successful hunts and the arrival of spring gave way to contemporary Euro-American symbols of culture. These changes in basket design elements reflect the subtle manner in which the Wasco and Wishram learned to absorb, adjust to, and reflect the emerging dominate culture. As opposed to the manner in which the Northeastern Algonquin were so quickly overwhelmed by Euro-American newcomers, acculturated into the dominate culture and responded with new basket technology for a new market economy, Wasco and Wishram culture was left intact for a longer period of time and incorporated new design elements into a traditional basket form.

Basket collecting among the Wasco and Wishram
The first important collectors of Mid-Columbia native basketry were native families themselves who preserved the basketwork of their own people which they collected through trade or purchase or were given as gifts at the time of important events, such as naming, joining, wedding, or death (Schlick 177). Non Indian collectors begin with Lewis and Clark who sent large deliveries of natural material objects to President Jefferson and to artists whose collections of curios were exhibited at world fairs and eventually went on to museums. “Missionaries, early settlers, soldiers, and other representatives of the government also obtained examples of the handiwork in the course of their lives among the people of the Mid-Columbia” (Schlick 178). These baskets were made for everyday use, trade or gifts as Wasco and Wishram women gradually adjusted to the new influences brought by Euro-American newcomers while continuing with many of their traditional cultural activities.

Toward the end of the 19th century many people who lived and worked among Native communities in the Mid-Columbia region began to feel, as easterners did, that Indian cultures were vanishing. The basket collecting craze of late 19th and early 20th century swept through the Mid-Columbia Plateau regions and collectors and budding anthropologist collected baskets directly from native weavers, they also bought and sold basket collections from each other, many of which eventually landed in museum collections. “In the Mid-Columbia region, the greatest effect of the new demand for baskets appeared to be on those coiling the Klikitat-style cedar root baskets. Although diminished during the previous half-century, the production of other types of basketry, such as the twined hats and bags and folded bark baskets continued, but primarily for native use rather than for sale to outsiders” (Schlick
Consequently, when scrolling through online collections of these baskets at the more prominent museums where they’re held, one notices few sally bags or corn husk bags.

In addition, one will notice that while the native community from which a basket originated maybe known and mentioned in the online text, the weavers are most often unknown and listed simply as anonymous. Most early anthropologists neglected to record pertinent information about the native weaver; for instance, her name, her community, her kinship ties, or her occupation. During the late 19th and early 20th century basket craze, native women from many native communities were glamorized for their intimate knowledge of nature and romanticized as the last of their tribe, and while their baskets and other cultural artifacts were readily collected as souvenirs, curios or mementos, most native weavers including the Wasco and Wishram remained largely nameless.

Rendering native women weavers nameless was one more institutional and patriarchal method of creating a marginalized population group. Native women’s roles as agricultural and subsistence tradeswomen was ignored by early explorers and colonist, their contribution was hampered by colonial land pressures and their production labeled domestic. Subsequent anthropologists and ethnographers perpetuated a “vanishing Indian” myth by separating native society from its cultural artifacts. Early anthropologists, ethnographers, and basket collectors, collected and focused on native material culture without regard to the cultural context or stories of the makers and in this manner native women were left anonymous.

IV. Fancy Baskets: Accommodation and Resistance
Changes in the basket technology of native women from the Coastal Algonquin and the Wasco/Wishram reveals the socioeconomic changes these women experienced from historical contact with Euro-American explorers to the early 20th century. Classic Period basketry among the Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram was traditional [land-based], indigenous basketry made in early post-contact time prior to acculturation with no non-native material or design influence (Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh 66). The few Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram Classic Period specimens available reveal that the materials and technique native women from these two groups used required a stable, long-term relationship within the environment from which they procured their materials and performed their basket construction. The stability of this environmental relationship centered, in large part, on the subsistence food gathering and agricultural practices native women developed over a long period prior to the introduction of European explorers and traders into their territory. European explorers and traders neglected to fully describe the intensive environmental and economic relationship native women from these two groups maintained. The sizable amounts of corn, roots, and salmon explorers encountered among these native communities was stored and traded by native women in baskets constructed into standard units of measurement which suggests that the trade networks and food value systems developed prior to contact were well established and well supported by an egalitarian society which valued equally the contributions of each member of the community.

Colonial pressures altered native women’s ability to continue the same level of subsistence activity and intense land-based relationship with their traditional territory and environment. Colonial interference and cultural disruption among the Algonquin began
around the mid-seventeenth century, earlier than for many other native communities. During this time, the traditional twined hemp and birch bark basket technology of the Algonquin quickly entered a Hiatus Period in which the adoption of European trade goods replaced many utilitarian basket functions and traditional basket making ceases. In contrast, the Wasco/Wishram initially managed to maintain their subsistence activities and traditional basket technology during historic contact and their basket construction entered a Transitional Period in which new European trade materials and cultural symbols were incorporated into basket construction: Wasco and Wishram corn husk bags flourished with new colors and designs.

After an initial period of mutual exchange and dependency during early trade in which native women played an active role, Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram cultures began to lose their economic, cultural and political autonomy through war/conflicts, disease and the destruction of resources upon which their societies depended. A distinct shift was made from female horticulture/gathering to patriarchal, male-dominated family farms (Janiewski 136). During historic contact and colonial time Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram women were pushed out of the developing fur trade and new market economy, they lost much of their subsistence gathering and agricultural land base and their contributions were disenfranchised by Euro-American gender standards. In the wake of colonization “Indigenous societies were barraged with the foreign concept of private property - land, livestock, housing - all of which inevitably belonged to individual men. The split between public and private labor and the introduction of the moneyed economies were devastating to the traditional economic authority of native women” (Anderson, Kim 62). Euro-American labor divisions trapped
native women within the limitations of the western domestic role which was considered by
the dominate Euro-American culture a secondary, supporting and inherently less important
role in the home (Anderson, Kim 60). As a result, the independent and autonomous
socioeconomic status of native women was supplanted by Euro-American men who
appropriated the land-based resources of native women and shut them out of the emerging
economic market.

Algonquin basket makers adopted a new wood splint technology early in the
18th century for the growing industrial Euro-American population and used the vocation of
basket maker to maintain certain traditional, land-based cultural features. While native
weavers incorporated Euro-American technology and cultural symbolism into their basket
weaving strategies through the use of commercial pigments, design elements, and forms that
buyers desired, they just as often resisted complete accommodation by maintaining old
decorative and color traditions. By maintaining older decorative and color traditions native
weavers could refer back to the past, identify with it and in this sense, it made their lives
traditional. In addition, among both the Algonquin and Wasco/Wishram population there was
a resistance to Euro-American gender divisions of labor, as well as government required
sedentary life within reservation boundaries. Among the Algonquin, both native men and
women basket makers resisted gender divisions of labor and reservation life by participating
in the new market for wood splint baskets as either seasonal peddlers or in co-operative
workshops. In both weaving formats weavers had to harvest their basket material seasonally,
share major work projects, and participate equally in the weaving and selling process.
Among the Wasco/Wishram there were many groups who refused to stay within reservation
boundaries, who insisted on their rights to live at seasonal fishing sites and continue
subsistence activity doing "Indian work" in an effort to maintain a traditional Indian identity.
Transitional Period basket construction among the Wasco resulted in smaller versions of the
traditional large sally bag, constructed with a combination of Indian hemp and Euro­
American twine or string and decorated with new cultural symbols such as rodeos and
domestic animals which were now part of their everyday life. Wishram Transitional Period
basket construction resulted in highly decorative corn husk bags made with colored yarn and
decorated with symbols reflecting the emerging dominate culture. In both cases, the
Transitional Period baskets made by the Wasco and Wishram were collected primarily by
native community members and maintained as heirlooms which reflect the importance native
weavers placed on keeping some aspects of traditional culture present.

Transitional Period Wasco and Wishram baskets were not specifically called
“fancy baskets.” While they were the focus of some collectors during the basket craze in the
late nineteenth to early twentieth century, sally bags and corn husk bags eventually entered
an Hiatus Period in which fewer and fewer baskets were made. In contrast, Algonquin wood
splint “fancy baskets” designed for Euro-American tourists with their Victorian sense of
ornate decoration and enhanced display value were made extensively throughout the
Northeast. While Algonquin men and women shared some major tasks involved in harvesting
and preparing wood splints for basket production, it was primarily native women who
constructed the fancy baskets. By this time, native women had traversed the impact of
colonization on their socioeconomic status; with their agricultural land appropriated by Euro­
American men they no longer needed utilitarian baskets designed to store multiple bushels of
cornt, instead native women eked out a living as a marginalized population weaving
decorative display baskets designed to sit prettily on the parlor shelves of Euro-American
households. The irony of the empty display basket displacing the bushel bark basket full of
corn, along with the reversal in status for native women, seems apparent; on the other hand,
weaving and selling fancy baskets provided an alternative to dichotomized low-wage
undervalued domestic labor, as well as continuing a tradition which defined Indians as a
cultural group.

Basket making as a continuity of tradition also defines Indian cultures. In 1991
anthropologist and author Bunny McBride helped the Aroostook Indians in Maine gain
federal recognition by demonstrating Micmac self-recognition and sense of self-worth
through basket making. Looking for their position of strength as a native community
McBride discovered “[i]t turned out to be baskets. For generations, Micmacs had made an
array of wood-splint baskets for harvest and storage and various household uses. They were
so poorly paid for them that few Micmacs still made them for a living, but almost every
Micmac had some family connection to the craft. They took pride in these beautiful
containers and in the skill it takes to find and fell the right tree and to transform a trunk into
smooth pliable strips for weaving” (Beem, Boston Globe). The Micmacs sold their baskets at
fairs and presented them to dignitaries and political figures making the baskets a focus for
their public life outside of their native community. In this way the baskets carried their
cultural history, defined them as a native community, gained them federal recognition and
$900,000 to buy land. Within native communities craftspeople maintained a position of
cultural authority through their perpetuation of particular traditional cultural practices such as
basket making. As a cultural practice basket making defined many native communities throughout historic time while also allowing native people to practice other culture features that were important to them as a people, such as “Indian work” which consisted of cooperative and complementary shared work, engagement in seasonal subsistence patterns and various fluctuating levels of economic independence.
Works Cited


Figure 1
"Yohicake" bag: circa 1650; Eastern Algonquin subarea, Connecticut Historical Society
Figure 2
Round Twined Bag:
Wasco/Wishram; late 18th to early 19th century. Collected by Lewis & Clark.
Peabody Museum, Harvard University
Figure 3
Plateau Corn husk bag: circa 1880;
geometric designs, hemp fiber, cornhusk,
and leather
Collection of Natalie Linn
Figure 4
Plateau Corn husk bag: circa 1910;
eagle/buffalo design, cornhusk, string, yarn,
leather
Collection of Lee and Lois Miner
Figure 5
Lidded Storage Basket: purchased prior to 1839; Eastern Algonquin subarea, black ash splints, four-part medallion design. Peabody Museum, Harvard University
Figure 6
Mohegan wall pocket: circa 1875-1900; plaited wood splints with "porcupine twist" and colored wefts, Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh


Figure 7
Round Twined Bag: Wasco/Wishram; mid to late 19th century, vegetable fiber. Collection of Jerrie and Anne Vander Houwen
Figure 8
Wasco style bags twined w/string, tule/grass: circa 1880; rodeo scene/cow motif reflect changes in native life, Southwest Museum.