

Hello, this is Ben Brown, Director and Curator of the Clarke Historical Museum with another Community Comment.

Do you have a collection of Native American baskets and items and are wondering what they are worth? The Clarke Museum is offering an evaluation day on December 10th from 11-3. Visit our website or give us a call for more information.

The Clarke Museum's collection of over 1,500 Native American baskets spans from pre-contact until recent times and shows the continuation and changes in the traditional art of basket weaving.

Collecting Native American baskets took off during Arts and Crafts movement at the turn of the 19th century as Native American curios became popular throughout the United States and the world. Capitalizing on this trend, Alexander Brizard founded the Brizards Department store, which had a major impact on made for the trade baskets.

Alexander Brizard created a business enterprise that was the largest mercantile corporation in Northwest California. This business is important to understanding several aspects of Native American baskets made for the trade. Not only were the Brizards actively engaged in buying and selling baskets, but the first publication of note featuring baskets from this region was a pamphlet written to market Hupa and Klamath Indian baskets.

Alexander was born in France in 1839, his father brought his family to Peru in 1843 where as a sea captain he was engaged in transporting goods. Alexander learned Spanish over the next six years, then English when his father found opportunity in the discovery of gold in California and set up a transportation business between Sacramento and San Francisco. In 1850 he moved to Uniontown and took Alexander with him to work in gold mines on the Trinity River.

Not striking it rich, the young Alexander became a clerk at Roskill and Company in Arcata, eventually purchasing the store in 1863 and moving it to the Jacoby Storehouse in 1879. Alexander opened branch stores in Weitchpec, Hoopa, Orleans, Somes Bar, Blue Lake, White Rock, Francis, China Flats, Requa and eventually Scotia.

Many of these inland stores were supplied by pack mule trains consisting of up to fifty-five mules. The mule trains were never attacked, revealing Brizard was on good terms with the Native American community. Once a year, Alexander would make an annual trip upriver to personally select baskets to purchase, in addition, branch managers who were knowledgeable about basket were sent on buying trips up and down the rivers and into the mountains.

By the early 1900s, Brizard stores were opened up in Phoenix and Los Angeles, though these stores closed prior to 1920.

The impact of Alexander Brizard and his sons on Northwest California Native American made for the trade baskets was significant, not only in regard to which baskets were purchased, but in developing a large sales outreach during the prime years of the Indian curio trade. The sale of baskets created a cottage industry for Native American women, who were able to help support their families as well as continue on the important tradition of basket weaving.

Please join us on December 10th from 11-3 at the Clarke Museum for our evaluation day of Native American baskets and items.