

10

Native Basketry and the Dynamics of Social Landscapes in Southern New England

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In this chapter, I discuss the role of objects in the practice of place-making. To do so, I examine the intersection of materiality and locality in an assemblage of Native baskets from southern New England. I follow their object itineraries from their manufacture by Native women in the early nineteenth century to their eventual curation in regional museums in the early twentieth century. Native basketmaking in New England has a rich history that extends from the precolonial era into the present day. But the baskets made by this particular generation of Native basketmakers have been used repeatedly over time in a variety of practices of placemaking (figure 10.1).

How did Native basketmakers in New England use baskets and practices of mobility to construct and maintain their own localities? Over the baskets' long-term possession by settler descendant populations, how did Western notions of place contribute to the changing meanings of Native baskets? I incorporate the study of baskets in their current museum locations and also attempt to access the traces baskets left in previous locations, from basketmakers' homes to local histories. I include some findings from my own archaeological work, a review of several local historical resources, and a discussion of Native basket museum studies. Although baskets and their meanings have changed over the past few centuries, their itineraries,



FIGURE 10.1

A Nipmuc basket ca. late 1820s to early 1840s, attributed to the Arnold family of Grafton, Massachusetts. Image courtesy of the Collection of Old Sturbridge Village.

their morphologies, and their material traces can still be marshaled to tell us something more about Native basketmakers in the early nineteenth century. By piecing together basket trajectories and the networks of relations created across space and over time, I acknowledge the role of objects in the creation of “overlapping territories” and “intertwined histories” in colonial New England (Said 1994).

Many scholars have explored the entanglement of social and material factors in Native practices of placemaking in New England (Brooks 2008; Gould 2010; Handsman 2003; McMullen and Handsman 1987; Mrozowski et al. 2009; Phillips 1998; Silliman 2009, 2010). Here, I consider Native material, spatial, and social dynamics in the early nineteenth century, and I also examine the continuous power of Native objects in the constant renegotiation of space and in the rewriting of New England’s historical narrative. Western discourse tends to want to isolate: we think of space in culturally bounded and physically sedentary terms, and we emplace people within those boundaries (Clifford 1997; Malkki 1997; Roddick, chapter 7, this volume). We also tend to essentialize things, assigning them a singular time and place in which they belong (Joyce, chapter 2, this volume). Rather than separate past and present, local and global, I will draw ties between

here and now and between there and then (see Walz, chapter 9, this volume) by calling attention to the networks of translation and interaction that have resulted in Native baskets being what they are today.

Here, Joyce's concept of the "object itinerary" (Joyce, chapter 2, Joyce and Gillespie, chapter 1, this volume) is critical in stressing the importance of both where and what an object is in the present (provenience) but also, and equally important, where it has been and what it has been in the past (provenance) (Joyce 2012a). The consideration of both provenience and provenance provides an opportunity to move away from abstract, static, and bounded understandings of things, their meanings, and their places in the world. For me, the process of building an object itinerary stresses an object's *dynamics* by revealing not only its physical and social malleability but also its trajectories and subsequent entanglements in the continual renegotiations of people and places over time.

CONFLICTING SPACES

Early colonial notions of place had physical and ideological ramifications: not only did they play a large role in the development of the Native basket industry, but also the clash of Native and colonial spatial realities structured much of colonial era Native experience in general (Cronon 1983). The dislocation of Native communities began in the seventeenth century, when colonists in New England disrupted the patterns of regional and seasonal mobility that had structured precolonial Native livelihoods (Bragdon 1996; Cronon 1983). English landownership laws blocked communal access to hunting and fishing grounds, and Natives' movement was often restricted, not only by the rapid installation of agrarian land boundaries but also by laws that prohibited their mobility as a response to the increased political tension of King Philip's War (Cronon 1983; Den Ouden 2005). In the late seventeenth century, Native individuals were restricted from moving from one settlement to the other without a permit, and colonial courts appointed local groups of English settlers as "overseers" of many Native communities in southeastern New England (Handsman 2008:177). This ruling further threatened the mobility that was crucial to the Native population for both social and subsistence reasons.

As Massachusetts's colonial population expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, tribal landholdings diminished at a rapid pace (O'Brien 1997). As the demand for farmland grew, the colonial government began a process of dispersing Native communities from their communally held property. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, many Native land parcels (at Natick and Hassanamesit, for example) were divided

into bounded entities, to be owned by individual Native families (headed usually by men, rarely by women) rather than the entire group (O'Brien 1997). Some families received a proprietorship, or a land grant, as well as rights to future allotments of Native communal property; others received only one-time grants; and vast numbers got nothing (O'Brien 1997:102). These plots were often separated from one another and surrounded by English farms, effectively dispersing Native communities and displacing them through tactics of confinement (Gould 2010; Gupta and Ferguson 1997:38; O'Brien 1997). With little experience in English-style agriculture or animal husbandry, Native people were forced to sell pieces of land for disposable income, health care, and food (O'Brien 1997). The scattering of Native land made it easy for English farmers to indebt their Native neighbors in times of hardship and then to demand land as payment. It also made it more difficult for Native people to come together as a community, to communicate with one another, and to help one another through the hardships of Native life under colonial rule.

This imposition of Euro-American space was not distributed on a blank canvas. Native people in New England had the momentum of their own historical trajectories with established practices and conceptions of the regional landscape that were not cast aside during colonial encroachment (Bell 2013; Patton 2014; P. Thomas 1976). There is strong evidence for Late Woodland period practices of seasonal and regional mobility, in concert with substantial evidence for maize horticulture and ceramic production throughout New England. This hybrid style of subsistence has been supported by many archaeologists working on precolonial New England and has been referred to by many names (Bendremer 1999:144), including "tethered mobility" (Heckenberger, Petersen, and Sidell 1992), "foraging horticulturalists" (Mulholland 1988), "conditional sedentism" (Dunford 1992), and "mobile farmers" (Chilton 2008).

During the Woodland period (and extending back millennia), the fundamental unit of Algonquian social organization was the local community, which formed through marriage and kin ties and tended to change often as people adjusted to fluctuating resource availability, social obligations, and political conditions (Grumet 1995). Johnson (1999) hypothesized that during the seventeenth century, villages in key positions or groups with influential leaders attracted surrounding "tributary" communities, which joined their tribal network, forming some of the well-known New England polities. Although cohesion among the bigger, more established communities was fairly stable, the loyalties and allegiances of other groups were often contested in the turmoil of the seventeenth

century, making for a “very dynamic political environment” (E. Johnson 1999:162). The seasonal availability of resources and kinship ties to other communities still necessitated extensive mobility within and often outside an understood tribal territory (O’Brien 1997:16–17), making for even more fluidity.

The precolonial practices of regional and seasonal mobility became more important than ever by the mid-eighteenth century, when communities were spread apart and many Native families were running out of land to sell. Native men often joined the military or the New England whaling industry, trades that could mean being away for months and years at a time (Bragdon 2009:228; O’Brien 1997). Although many Native women maintained homes and small landholdings, they often traveled long distances to find wage work and to preserve community and family ties (Bragdon 2009:5; O’Brien 2010). Indigenous people found work as day laborers; traveled regionally selling brooms, baskets, or herbal remedies; worked as teamsters; and built the stone walls that still line New England’s network of back roads today (Mandell 2007). Relatively mobile livelihoods such as these were influenced by precolonial practices of regional and seasonal movement yet were transformed by motivations specific to the colonial situation. They provided an alternative to an agrarian subsistence that was becoming more and more untenable as Native landholdings dwindled, but perhaps just as important, they provided a means for the maintenance of widely dispersed social networks.

Many people adopted mobile lifestyles in New England in the uncertain economy of the late eighteenth century, but Native people were more successful in their mobile enterprises because they had a working knowledge of the regional landscape and had widespread networks of family and friends on which they could rely for food and shelter (Mandell 2007:35). The spatial dispersion intended to strain Native community networks in fact gave rise to new forms of community interaction and led to the maintenance of strong and meaningful relationships across great distances (Bragdon 2009:8; Law 2008; Law and Pezzarossi 2009).

The nineteenth-century Native woodsplint basket industry offers an opportunity to illustrate the material and social dimensions of Native spatial realities, realities that existed both within and in spite of Euro-American spatial constructions. Native women would often work together in groups, making baskets in the fall and winter, and travel regionally in the warmer months selling their wares to settlers (McMullen 1987; Ulrich 2001). Basketsellers established regional routes along which they would sell their work to the same households year after year (Lester 1987; McMullen

1987). In 1901 the Reverend John Avery of Ledyard, Connecticut, remembered basketmaker Anne Wampy:

Ann[e] Wampy used to make an annual trip in the early spring past my home up through Preston City, Griswold, and Jewett City, selling the baskets she had made during the previous winter. When she started from her home she carried upon her shoulders a bundle of baskets so large as almost to hide her from view. In the bundle would be baskets varying in size from a half-pint up to five or six quarts, some made of very fine splints, some of coarse, and many skillfully ornamented in various colors. Her baskets were so good that she would find customers at almost every house. And after traveling a dozen or twenty miles and spending two or three days in doing it her load would all be gone. (Avery 1901:260–261)

The archaeological work done at the Sarah Boston Farmstead site, the home of a well-known, early nineteenth-century basketmaker in Grafton, Massachusetts, illustrates some of the social dimensions of Native mobility and basketmaking (Law 2008; Mrozowski, Law, and Pezzarossi 2006). Although the New England weather and acidic soils all but guarantee that no surviving woodsplint basketry will ever be found there, I can use the material traces of Sarah's home to piece together some insights about her basketmaking and the role it played in her life. Documentary research in conjunction with analysis of the ceramics, glass, and iron assemblage from the Sarah Boston Farmstead site suggests that Sarah's home was more than adequately equipped as a social gathering place. This hints at both her role as a hostess in regional Native networks and her interest in sustaining relationships with her Euro-American neighbors.

Native basketmakers and other Native travelers relied on one another for food and shelter during their journeys, making the most of the hospitality of their widely scattered family and friends to extend their social reach and customer base (Law 2008; Pezzarossi 2008; Pezzarossi, Kennedy, and Law 2012). I have pieced together traces of Sarah's basketmaking toolkit from the site assemblage, which included many knives and other specialized tools that she may have used in basketmaking, along with objects that speak to Sarah's time spent in traveling, such as folding knives, flasks, and even ice creepers (iron fittings that attach to the bottom of shoes for ease in walking on ice). The findings from the Sarah Boston site have helped me imagine aspects of Sarah's life on the farmstead, but they also point to her residence beyond her own property, in other spaces of familiarity,

of community, and even of conflict. This further accentuates the need for a multisited, multidisciplinary approach to the study of this history that would more fully appreciate the interplay of Native mobility and materiality in the colonial world and that would consider how, in the face of colonial encroachment, Native people continued to inhabit the New England landscape.

NATIVE SPACES

The circulation of baskets strengthened the spatial extension of Native communities. Baskets made explicitly for sale to white settlers were uniquely suited to help basketmakers build a spatially expansive network of relationships with fellow basketmakers and also with their customers. Baskets played a crucial role in the maintenance of Native social space but also served as mediators in Natives' social relations with settlers and in turn facilitated the remembrance of Native basketsellers in Euro-American histories. A closer look at the characteristics of the baskets themselves reveals their role as potentially "inalienable objects" through which Native people were able to reconstitute their social and spatial relations through time and across great distances (Weiner 1992).

Baskets reified and reinforced the relationship that Native women had with their tribal communities and families (McMullen and Handsman 1987). Scholars of Native New England basketry (McMullen and Handsman 1987; Tantaquidgeon and Fawcett 1987; Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh 1987) have established that the decorative motifs and specific forms and materials of Native baskets functioned as tangible expressions of Native basketmaker "communities of practice" (see Blair, chapter 5, Díaz-Guardamino, chapter 6, Roddick, chapter 7, this volume). Ann McMullen studied Mohegan basket motifs in light of the political climate in Native southern New England in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (McMullen and Handsman 1987). At that time, many Mohegans and other Native peoples in southern New England left the area with the Brotherton movement, a Native resettlement campaign organized as a response to religious dissatisfaction, dwindling Native landholdings, and increased poverty in New England (Cipolla 2010). McMullen (1987:115) found that certain designs were "used to make statements about identity and the land." She proposed that the positioning of design elements in one way meant that "those Mohegan who lived outside the limits of Mohegan land were no different from those who lived inside" (McMullen 1987:115) whereas other design configurations were meant to be a comment on the illegitimacy of Mohegan identity outside tribal homeland boundaries.

McMullen's study provided material evidence that Native communities in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth were wrestling with the implications of colonial spatial constraints and Western spatial logic not as outsiders, but from within, as members of the larger New England society and of their own Native society simultaneously. The possibility that they debated some of these spatial dimensions of identity through basket art and design underlines the centrality of objects in the negotiation of Native sociospatial identities.

Baskets also served to mediate and cement social relationships with the settler population. Basket styles communicated tribal and even familial affiliation not just among basketmakers, but to their customers as well. Their particular decorations signaled a distinct "Native" identity that was recognizable as a kind of trademark to Euro-American women and that helped Native women to garner repeat and reliable customers in widespread networks. Small decorative baskets satisfied an emerging Victorian craving for domestic order, beauty, and cleanliness (Phillips 1998:204). The chosen sizes and forms, in combination with the ornamental floral patterns, appealed to Euro-American women as efficient yet decorative storage solutions for clothing and other home goods (Phillips 1998:207).

Whereas some aspects of basket design were developed for mass appeal, other characteristics highlighted the personal nature of the relationships between European and Native American women. Occasionally, Native women would make baskets as gifts, as in the case of the Paugussett woman Molly Hatchett, who made woodsplint rattles as presents for her customers' children (Handsman and McMullen 1987; Orcutt and Beardsley 1880). In other instances, Native women inscribed their customers' names prominently into the basket or placed their own initials on the bottom (figure 10.2; Phillips 1998). These techniques provided the buyer with a material mnemonic that facilitated the creation of a personal historical narrative around the object. The creation of a personal link between a basketmaker and her customers was an important part of the basketselling business; it encouraged consumer loyalty and helped to ensure the success of future basketselling journeys.

Baskets and their designs were meant to strengthen the relationships of Native women to their customers and ultimately to one other. From the beginning, Native baskets had multiple and shared meanings for both the Euro-American customer and the Native artisan. The relevance of a basket in either the English or the Native sphere did not negate its significance in the other (Myers 2002). In fact, their full utility depended on their ability to embody many meanings at once, to be a physical mediator or bridge



FIGURE 10.2

A Native basket ca. 1900 with the customer's name inscribed as decoration, attributed to the Aquinnah (Gay Head) Wampanoag people. Photo by Heather Law Pezzarossi, used with permission from the Mohegan Library and Archives.

between seemingly separate spheres. Baskets both produced and were a product of in-betweenness, and they facilitated the formation of a diversity of social relationships. They were able to draw together Native basketmaking communities in the production process and to extend them in space through the baskets' distribution.

Strathern's (1988) discussion of the "partibility" or "divisibility" of personhood in Melanesia provided a conceptual tool to help see Native basketmakers as constituted through their connections and relations with people, places, and things (A. Jones 2005). Baskets helped to create lasting relationships and, in so doing, to distribute personhood in both time and space. We might also consider this in Gell's (1998:13) or Latour's (2005:74) terms, imagining the baskets as conduits or "indices of human agency" that enabled successful "collective action"—in this case, mobile lifestyles—by solidifying connections with Euro-American customers and within the basketmaking community, creating lasting social relationships across great physical distances.

NARRATIVE OBJECTS AND AMERICAN SPACES

The concepts of partibility and the extension of human agency also apply to the multiple authorship of Native baskets as they continued their

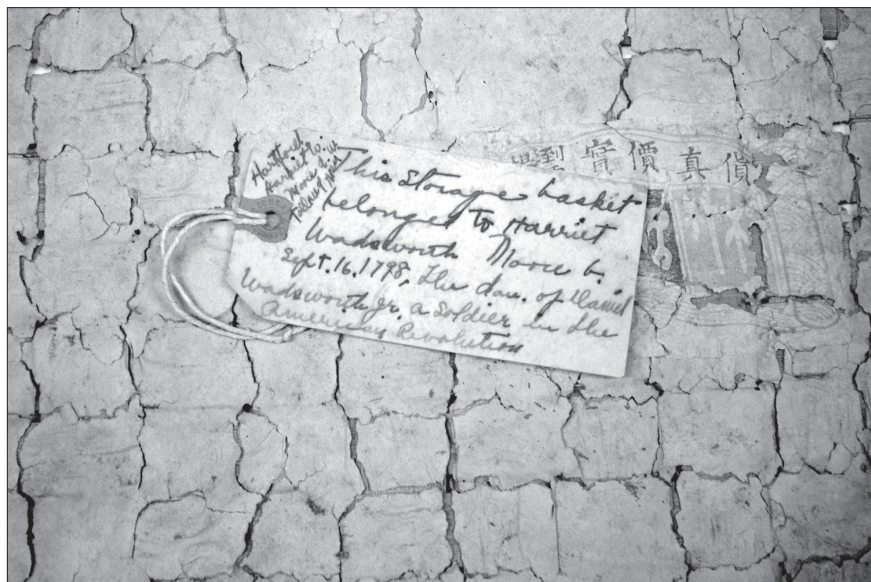


FIGURE 10.3

A Native basket ca. 1830–1840 (possibly from the Simsbury/Hartford area of Connecticut) lined with a Chinese newspaper from New York City and accompanied by a tag with the donor’s genealogical information. Photo by Heather Law Pezzarossi, used with permission from Old Sturbridge Village.

circulation in the remainder of the nineteenth and into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Baskets and the basketmaking tradition have generated both new and historically significant meanings in New England’s Native communities, but many Native woodsplint baskets remained in Euro-American hands for generations. I can trace some of the changing meanings and uses for these baskets as they moved through time and space in a further enchainment of social relations. As baskets circulated throughout New England, they also sometimes receded from the public eye and then reemerged with altered meanings, accumulated stories, and heightened historical value, contributing to changing notions of space in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Scholars have found little record of the circulation of baskets during the late nineteenth century. Many were probably used and repurposed. Some were stored away; others were given as gifts. I assume that many were eventually broken, discarded, and forgotten. Settlers occasionally left some physical clues about the employment of Native baskets during the early nineteenth century. Alterations made to baskets during this time speak



FIGURE 10.4

A Native basket ca. early to mid-nineteenth century, possibly Nipmuc, lined with the Worcester County Advocate from April 18, 1848. Photo by Heather Law Pezzarossi, used with permission from Old Sturbridge Village.

to a potent physical morphology in which baskets—ephemeral, fragile, and malleable objects—gain and lose physical properties readily and, in some cases, synchronously, with the acquisition of new meanings. Often, settlers lined their baskets with newspaper to protect woolen clothing from snagging on splint ends or picking up loose fibers from the interior of the basket. The remnants of such papers provide spatial and temporal clues in tracing basket itineraries. The basket in figure 10.3 was lined with a Chinese newspaper from New York City, and the basket in figure 10.4 was lined with an edition of the Worcester County *Advocate* printed in April 1848. In most cases, we know little about basket itineraries beyond such small clues. This ambiguity became an important asset when Native baskets reemerged in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth as valuable objects in the reorientation of New England’s changing landscape (compare the discussion of ambiguity in Gillespie, chapter 3, this volume).

As discussed above, many Native basketmakers maintained regular routes and enjoyed repeat business from their customers for years (McMullen 1987; Ulrich 2001). As might be expected, Native women peddlers were

thus highly visible and became well known in the settler communities they visited (Ulrich 2001). Many Native craftswomen became ingrained in the social memory of the communities they frequented, no doubt due in part to the continued presence of Native baskets in the homes and lives of their owners. Through basketry, the agency of Native basketmakers was distributed across space and also through time. Stories of their craftsmanship and their interactions with local townspeople circulated regionally for decades. They were reshaped continually along the way in what Van Dyke and Alcock (2003:3) called “an active and ongoing project” in which “people remember or forget the past according to the needs of the present” (see also Díaz-Guardamino, chapter 6, this volume).

It was not until many generations later that the stories and memories of traveling Native craftswomen of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were recorded in local town histories, texts that became popular at the end of the nineteenth century as part of the larger regionalist and nationalist goals to define and memorialize the colonial American landscape. Ironically, Native baskets were incorporated into Victorian practices of placemaking, the same practices, dictated by bounded and sedentary productions of space and notions of landownership, that triggered the displacement of Native people in the seventeenth century and led to the development of the Native basket industry.

In an effort to build up an American national identity, local and regionalist historians cultivated nostalgia for the simplicity of the colonial era. They romanticized the intimacy of small New England towns and endowed locals with identities deeply rooted in the New England landscape. They emphasized place in the creation of identity, which was strengthened by the descriptive detail of homes, their construction, the objects inside (B. Brown 2003), and the sounds and rhythms of work taking place in the surrounding landscape. Passages idealized the insulated, colonial New England landscape:

If a bird's eye view could be vouchsafed of one of those far-away Sunday mornings, it would show a net-work of roads crossing, binding, surrounding, the successions of hills, ridges, and valleys, and from the various localities, from Bagburn and Barn Hill, from Moose Hill and Walnut Tree Hill, from Corum and The Landing, from Paul's Pound and Fool's Hatch, from Isinglass and Trap-fall, from Pishponk and Hammertown, from Turkey Roost and Knell's Rocks, from all points of the compass, the face of man and beast turned toward “the Centre.” (de Forest Shelton 1900:43)

Other passages illustrated the circumscription of the colonial household: “In these days of rapid transit and easy inter-communication, it is hard to realize the life lived on the upper hills, when intercourse with the world was obtained only by toiling over rough roads.... Every house was not only its own center, but almost its own circumference” (de Forest Shelton 1900:78).

With the enclosure and definition of the New England countryside, colonists sought to anchor their own identities to the land, to build a legacy for the sake of their own legitimacy. Woven seamlessly into these narratives are sentimental notions of identity and place that assume that to know a particular landscape, to establish a prolonged and intimate connection with a piece of land, to have a “home,” is to be where one belongs (B. Brown 2003; Malkki 1997). Local historians folded memories of Native travelers and their routes into descriptions of the colonial landscape, rich with spatial references to well-established farms and well-known colonial historical landmarks, in an effort to reorient readers to a specifically American spatial history. They marginalized the residence of Native people by downplaying the social and material interconnections of Native and settler lives (Bruchac 2007). They created physical distance between the civilized center and the wild periphery and temporal distance between the modern community and the past, where Native people resided (cf. Pratt 2008). The following excerpts evidence the Native out-of-placeness or in-betweenness created by regionalist histories:

Sarah Boston,—a gigantic Indian woman, said to have been the last lineal descendant of King Philip.... Her house was in Grafton, on Keith Hill, where her cellar and doorstone may still be seen, on the farm of Mr. David L. Fiske. (Forbes 1889:177)

More persons now living remember Simon Gigger. He was short and small, living first in a swamp towards Shrewsbury, in a hut built of stones.... The remains of his old shanty can still be found near the arch bridge on the Boston & Albany railroad. (Forbes 1889:173)

As products of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, these local histories reflected a time when imperialism was at a peak and campaigns of philanthropy and reform were seamlessly melded with emerging discourses of racial discrimination and moral hierarchy (Stoler 2001:845). They simultaneously employed the sentiments of Social Darwinism, the temperance movement, and the cult of domesticity to marginalize local

Native people and their way of life. Local basketsellers of the early nineteenth century were made into local legends as “tramps” and “walkabouts” (Earle 1900; Forbes 1889). Historians attributed their transience to abject poverty and alcohol abuse and contrasted their lifestyle with the wholesomeness of village farm life. Regionalist writers often attributed this unsavory movement to predispositions toward laziness or to Native tradition:

Almost every community had two or three of these semi-civilized Indian residents, who performed some duties sometimes, but who often in the summer, seized with the spirit of their fathers or the influence of their earlier lives wandered off for weeks or months, sometimes selling brooms and baskets, sometimes reseating chairs, oftener working not, simply tramping trustfully, sure of food whenever they asked for it. (Earle 1900:94)

Molly Hatchett was a good specimen of the Paugasucks. Nearly six feet tall, muscular, erect, of stately step, with long, black hair falling over her shoulders, with piercing black eyes, of polite and commanding appearance, she was a noble relic of a barbarous race.... She was rather fond of “uncupe,” as she called rum, and this was her besetting sin, for which she blamed the whites. (Orcutt and Beardsley 1880:51)

Other Indian “walk-about,” as tramps were called, lived in the vicinity of Malden, Massachusetts; old “Moll Grush,” who fiercely resented her nickname,... “Squaw Shiner,” who died from being blown off a bridge in a gale, and who was said to be “a faithful friend, a sharp enemy, a judge of herbs, a weaver of baskets, and a lover of rum.” (Earle 1900:96)

In this context, Euro-Americans saw Native mobility as an act of desperation, a last effort to survive when all hope for a permanent land base had been exhausted. These assumptions rendered the famed Native travelers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries harmless and even helpless in the eyes of Euro-American readers. The image of the “wandering Indian” fit neatly into the larger narrative of the “vanishing Indian” in which the mobile way of life would ultimately be replaced by the superior ways of agricultural sedentism (O’Brien 2010). To the Victorian era local history reader, whose permanent settlements and strict property lines frowned on vagrancy of any kind, the wandering Native made sense because the narrative—built on the observance of local and regional spatial boundaries

—allowed no conception of the width and dispersal of the Native social networks that surrounded the reader.

Reading these histories, my own initial instinct was to discount the descriptions of Native people as local appropriations of imperialist discourse. Yet, dismantling popular histories is a destructive enterprise unless we replace “the largely mythical but socially functional ‘past’” (Blustein 2008:178) with something stronger. All people participate in both the social process and the narrative construction of history, and these two sides of historicity can never be successfully considered in isolation (Trouillot 1995). Trouillot (1995:29) claimed that the narratives of history are not merely fictions but are tethered to one another by the “materiality of the socio-historical process.” Given this, I argue that Native basketmakers played an active role in the makings of the memories reflected in these texts. It might be possible to strengthen silenced and untold histories by looking anew at the histories we have.

De Certeau (1984:123) explained that in contrast to the hard lines and permanence of maps, the boundaries of itineraries are formed in the “compilation of stories” that are linked to other stories, which creates places for interaction and mobility by articulating a “theater” for the performance (see Walz, chapter 9, this volume). This leads me to consider the central role that Native baskets themselves played in the creation of local stories. According to Latour (2005:132), mediators of social relationships such as the baskets discussed here leave “traces” that allow for the sketching of networks of agency. The memories in local histories can be considered to be traces of baskets and their makers that have been consumed and made anew as recollections and local remembrance.

In the further consumption and reproduction of Native baskets as memory, their itineraries can be traced through local history. I have had some initial success in using local histories to better understand the space created by the Nipmuc basketmaker Sarah Boston. Several local histories mentioned her selling baskets throughout the region and helping farmers with their field labor (Earle 1900; Forbes 1889). By spatially plotting memories of Sarah in multiple town histories and drawing connections between Sarah and other Native community members mentioned in the texts, I have begun to visualize the social landscape that Sarah built with the help of her baskets. Sarah routinely traveled from her home in Grafton to locations in Upton and as far as Middleborough, selling her work and visiting Nipmuc families (Earle 1900; Forbes 1889). She often traveled with other Native women, including Deb Browner, who lived in Westborough (Forbes

1889:173–174), and Bets Hendricks, who also lived in Westborough (“on the Old Mill Road on the right hand side as you go from Main Street on land now owned by Moses Pollard” [Forbes 1889:174]). Local histories also described at least ten Euro-American farms and mentioned several caves where Native travelers either sought shelter when traveling or had permission to reside more permanently. Sarah Boston’s network may have extended through much of Worcester County and beyond, including the towns of Grafton, Worcester, Holden, Shrewsbury, Northborough, Marlborough, Westborough, Mendon, Upton, and Hopkinton, Massachusetts. Without the local histories, I would not have been able to trace these paths.

This large composite space, compiled from the effects of Sarah’s mobility and her social and material interactions, was Sarah’s world, in contrast with her marginal presence in local histories. It existed simultaneously with other colonial constructions of space, but because of its unique scale (the spatial breadth of her social connections), the cohesion and utility of her space went unnoticed by Euro-American settlers, whose spatial realities may have been more constricted or at least considered more sedentary (see Prude 1999). As in similar cases of mixed spaces (Byrne 2003; Escobar 2001), the camouflage that resulted from the discordance of Native and English spaces probably afforded New England’s Native basketmakers more freedom of movement and opportunities for enterprise.

SPACES OF GENTRY

Local histories of the late nineteenth century did more than just record memories of Native basketmakers; they spurred the reemergence and redefinition of Native baskets themselves. Shortly after regional and town histories became popular, Native baskets were appropriated by second- and third-generation Euro-Americans as objects of prestige in the reconfiguration of a colonial New England landscape. Baskets began showing up at local historical societies, donated by their owners as pieces of colonial Americana. The possession of Native baskets identified their owners as descendants of rooted, well-established colonial families, at a time when New England’s social and physical landscape was changing drastically as a result of industrial growth and expanding immigrant populations. To Victorian New Englanders, the ownership of Native baskets offered a unique opportunity to physically tie their own personal and family legacy into emerging local histories, which then fit neatly into corresponding narratives of American colonial history on the whole (Phillips 1998; Ulrich 2001). Memories and narratives associated with baskets and the social relationships they represented lent them more credibility and value,

similar to how African tourist art was lent value by associated narratives (Steiner 1990).

In letters to the curator of Harvard's Peabody Museum between 1903 and 1905, the collector W. C. Curtis (1904a) noted, "Quite a number of these baskets...have for years been stored in the garrets of prominent families' Homes and not until recently (in connection with revived Basket Interest) brought out." He went on to attribute donated baskets to many families in the Derby, Connecticut, area, each mentioned by full name and town of residence. Most claimed a personal connection to their baskets' makers. Some of the reported genealogies were quite long and intricate and illustrated the role that baskets must have had not only in the formation of social relationships over the years but also in the construction of prestige and notoriety among local townspeople. Many stops on each basket's itinerary were carefully acknowledged. However, the connection to the basketmaker was forgotten:

These baskets were once the property of Miss Sarah Hull—now Galpin. She is the niece of Commodore Isaac Hull of Revolutionary fame. The baskets were given by her to Miss Jane De Forest Shelton of Derby (the author of "The Salt Box House," a book which preserves in a delightful form a good deal of the history and tradition of the locality), who has in turn presented them to the historical collection of the Sarah Riggs Humphrey Chapter, D.A.R. [Daughters of the American Revolution], Derby, Connecticut. (Curtis 1904b:389)

Owners of Native baskets often altered their heirlooms physically by inscribing them or by affixing small tags with genealogical information before donating them. These alterations physically substantiated the strings of relationships that anchored their personal biography to that of the object. In turn, this tied the object to local historical narratives and thus to American history writ large. The tag in figure 10.3 reads, "This storage basket belonged to Harriet Wadsworth Moore b. Sept. 16, 1798, The dau. of Daniel Wadsworth Jr., a soldier in the American Revolution." Another inscription inside a basket reads, "Basket made by Molly Hatchett, an Indian princess, at Turkey Hill, Derby, Connecticut, who died about 1829" (Curtis 1904b:389). Native baskets took on a new kind of value when paired with a crafted historical narrative, becoming powerful "biographical objects" (Hoskins 1998:4). The object itself was the final link in a network of relations that "anchor[ed]" the owner in both place and time (Hoskins 1998:8; see also Roddick, chapter 7, this volume).

The status of Native baskets nearly a hundred years after their initial distribution challenges us to imagine both the inalienable and mutable properties of objects. As products of carefully established social relationships, the baskets had the power to memorialize and physically substantiate historical narratives in ways that written histories could not. As distinctly “Native” objects in the possession of Euro-Americans, they were subject to discursive change, the transformative effects of memory, and the motivations of subsequent actants, who might employ them as material delegates in the spatial and temporal extensions of their own subjectivities.

ANTHROPOLOGICAL SPACES

Native baskets made a transition from objects of prestige in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century New England towns to objects of cultural comparison and circumscription in twentieth-century museum settings. Regionalism fed into early American anthropology in three interconnected ways (Bruchac 2007).

First, it sentimentalized both the local and the past by idealizing rural American towns as charmingly simple, pure, and geographically and culturally unique. The temporal and spatial isolation of a “pure” Americanness fed seamlessly into anthropology’s sociogeographic essentialization of other cultures around the world. Second, regionalism operationalized the nineteenth-century American “manifest destiny” attitude that justified racial hierarchies. Local histories celebrated Native basketsellers as local heroes but simultaneously endowed them with fundamentally flawed physical and character traits that rendered them incapable of surviving in the modern world (O’Brien 2010). Third, as Bill Brown (2003) discussed, regionalism sentimentalized the link between people and place through the material world, where things held pivotal roles as emotional and geographical anchors, tying people to the land and the past (Brown 2003:93). The exhaustively descriptive tableaus of regionalist literature communicated that “an object emanate[d] an aura of culture, whereby an everyday object bec[a]me a cultural thing” (Brown 2003:92). Brown linked these associations directly to the emerging lessons of early anthropology, claiming that regionalist literature “anticipated the ethnographic narrative” and the discipline’s equation of things and humans, “pots and people,” and their further connection to place (Brown 2003:86).

When examined on an interpersonal level, the intimate connection between late nineteenth-century regionalism and the emergence of American anthropology comes into sharper relief. The transition from small-town contexts to regional museums can be traced by plotting the

shift of baskets and basket interest from local histories to anthropological texts. The local prestige associated with basket ownership was further distributed and potentially amplified when townspeople donated their heirloom baskets to highly respected museums. Many of New England's collectors actively sought out museums to do just that. Unaffiliated collectors often acted as mediators between local historical societies and museum curators (Hinsley 1992), as was the case with W. Conway Curtis, a self-proclaimed expert on Native woodsplint basketry and a local resident of Derby, Connecticut. Curtis (1904b) published one of the first known articles devoted specifically to Native woodsplint basketry of New England, in the *Southern Workman*. His information came from two sources, which he deftly combined: local historians and collectors and the emerging anthropological scholarship on Native basketry.

The correspondence in which Curtis brought his collection of baskets to the attention of Charles Willoughby at the Harvard Peabody Museum in 1904 revealed some sociopolitical dynamics involved in the negotiation of emerging academic and amateur fields. Curtis (1904a) took great pains to make known his established relationships with Otis Mason (the author of an anthropological text on Native basketry in the United States that was also published in 1904) and with the Peabody's director, Frederic Ward Putnam. At the same time, he recounted detailed chains of ownership, quoting recollections about the baskets and their places in local historical narratives. Curtis's explanation of one particular chain of ownership was particularly illustrative of how important it was for basket donors to have their names forwarded along with their baskets. Curtis had attempted to buy one "Molly Hatchett" basket from a local woman, Emily Clarke. Her response hinted at the gauntlet of local politics Curtis endured in order to present these baskets to the museum: "Her answer (through Mrs. Birdseye) was that instead of accepting my offer she would herself present it to the Museum and for me to say it was presented by Miss Emily Clarke of Derby, Connecticut.... It was through our friend Mrs. Elvira Couch Birdseye that the Basket was secured. You will please acknowledge the receipt of the basket to Miss Clarke" (Curtis 1904a).

As a result of such careful transactions and deliberately established social connections, donors, chains of ownership, and local historical narratives appeared in museum displays and early anthropological texts on Native basketry (Curtis 1904b; Mason 1904). They blended seamlessly into the institutional canon of American anthropology. The names of the basketmakers were often lost because museums saw the baskets not as local or personal but as normative specimens of regional artifact types (Clifford 1997).

Native baskets introduced into the museum setting shifted meaning once again and came to define yet another kind of space. For museums, baskets communicated a timeless Indianness that satisfied emerging appetites for material “authenticity.” Since the nineteenth century, the concept of authenticity has had a tremendous impact on the value and meaning of objects generally and indigenous objects more specifically. The term communicates simultaneously an aesthetic preference for singularity and a modern longing for the familiar, a nostalgia for the traditional past (Benjamin 1968[1936]; Eco 1985). Native baskets were valued for their rarity and their transmission of historical meaning but also for their predictably repetitive attributes and their potential in vast collections for exhibition and mass consumption. Museums used Native baskets to associate Native groups with the past and to delimit geographic territories. Museum representatives began visiting local towns in search of “specimens” of Native basketry with which to compose their master regional typologies. They tried to decipher and separate baskets with Native meaning from those without. They developed sets of attributes that they felt made one basket more valuable than another.

Museums and ethnologists looked for ways to privilege a Native past that was pure and untainted by modernity. They worked out axes of difference between authentically Native baskets and modern, illegitimate specimens. Some scholars argued that baskets made for Euro-American consumption could not, by definition, be authentic (Willoughby 1905). Others conditioned a basket’s authenticity on evidence of its manufacturing technique, claiming that “genuine aboriginal specimens” were made of splints “obtained by pounding off the years’ growth rather than manufactured by instruments of our civilization (the drawshave)” (Curtis 1904a). Some attempted to draw the line between indigenous significance and pure commercialism along the axis of decoration, claiming that some decorations had indigenous meaning but others only parroted emerging American folk art motifs. The common thread in all of these criteria was that the more modern something was, the less authentically “Native” it could be (O’Brien 2010). This resulted in the negation of Native authorship of more recent styles of Native New England basketry.

Scholars also tried to assign normative decorative motifs and forms to individual tribal territories, inspired by anthropological models of “culture areas” (Kroeber 1947). These models attempted to identify central places and moments of heightened “cultural intensity” from which cultural knowledge and identity diffused (Buckley 1988). This allowed for the negation of Native identity outside determined culture areas (Phillips 1998)

and denied the legitimacy of baskets that exhibited “mixed” motifs. These studies also aided the illusion of indigenous purity and supported anthropological misconceptions about the spatial self-containment of cultural systems (Clifford 1997). These models sent the message that the more global something was, the less authentic or local it could be.

Collectors and museums illustrated the contradictory notions of assimilation and extinction that collide in the paradox of authenticity. On one hand, scholars saw innovative material culture as evidence of Native assimilation; on the other hand, they collected objects that conformed to essentialist notions of the timeless Native, supporting theories of Native extinction. Caught between imperialist desires for similarity and for difference, many Native baskets were deemed inauthentic in one sense or another.

CONCLUSION

Native basketselling and other mobile enterprises emerged as productive strategies to maintain community in spite of Western spatial restrictions. Baskets played a social and material role in the creation of Native space in the early nineteenth century and acted as a physical mnemonic, leaving traces of their whereabouts in local histories. Baskets were drawn into Victorian era campaigns for local notoriety and place-based identity formation. Narratives formed around those strategies then melded into modern anthropological practices of cultural conscription. The baskets themselves have moved but also have been kept still, recruited to reconfigure the space around them. Throughout this process, baskets have acted as mediators in social relations, extending them in time and space and allowing for the social and material production of new spaces layered over but informed by older ones. The study of object itineraries is not just about the movement or circulation of objects in space. Spaces must also be negotiable, and they are continuously “becoming” through practice, not rootedness (Massey 2005).