

A.W. Ericson and Grace Nicholson's Photographs of the Luddington Family

Ron Johnson

A. W. Ericson and Grace Nicholson are at opposite poles in photographing Native Americans from Northwest California. This essay explores their previously unidentified photographs of the Luddingtons and why these photographs are significant. As a commercial photographer A.W. Ericson seldom recorded the name of the person(s) in his Native American photographs. This is true of his well known but locally unidentified photograph of an Indian family from c. 1893.¹(Figure 1)



Figure 1. The John and Emma Luddington Family 1893, Humboldt State University Library, print from original glass negative

¹ Humboldt State University's Humboldt Room collection does not give it a title, only an alternative title "Wiyot? Scene near Arcata/Unknown, 1999.020213;" A print of this photograph in the Smithsonian Archive is titled "Scene Near Arcata." In a popular book of late 19th c. photographs *Our Own Country* it is titled, *the Happy Indian Family.*"

Success in identifying the family came when a captioned reproduction was discovered in the California State Indian Museum in Sacramento titled “John Luddington, Yurok, his wife Emma and family at Weitchpec.” This information came to the California State Indian Museum in 1985 identified by Sam Jones Jr. and recorded on an a print of the A. W. Ericson photograph given to the museum by Peter Palmquist.²

Why is Ericson’s photograph of the Luddington Family so important? First it is a magnificent photograph with the Luddingtons looking at the camera and they are close enough to see excellent facial detail. The photograph also reveals both the retention of some Native American traditions and the adoption of new western ways of American culture. Indian tradition is revealed in Emma Luddington’s fine line chin tattoo, which was considered beautiful from a Native American perspective but the opposite from western tradition. The Indian baby basket in this photograph has a life line across the top, which is often removed when they are sold but essential for the spirit of the baby from a Native American perspective. The attachment of beads & shells for the baby to play with also follows Yurok tradition. The hazel stick baby basket still remains popular in the Indian community.

Ericson’s photograph also reveals changes to a western life style as the couple wear contemporary American clothing. The setting has an ivy background, a non-native plant that would have to have been transplanted or purchased. The photographic tradition of a standing man and seated woman holding a baby is also a western tradition. Most younger Indian men were now wearing western jackets, shirts, and pants as John Luddington wears. Emma Luddington probably wears her best dress, which reflects recent fashions from France where the sleeves puff out a little near the shoulder, and the diagonal stripes and linear patterns are boldly and asymmetrically patterned. The dress follows custom in being full length. The finest dresses were made of silk and could have satin and lace appliqué. This dress is probably cotton but it is certainly an afternoon dress not a common house dress.

² An enlarged copy of this photograph is displayed in the California State Indian Museum, Sacramento. Information about the date of receiving the photograph, the person who identified it, and the source of the print came from Ileana Maestas, Curator at the Museum, e-mail November 5, 2013. Sam Jones Jr. who identified the Luddingtons was born in 1913 and lived at Martin’s Ferry, which is sufficiently close for him to have known the family.

Thus Emma's dress and John's suit indicate their adoption of nineteenth century clothing now common in the region

Later Ericson cropped a detail of the woman and baby for a postcard and one of the baby for a half size postcard.³ Thus the commercial value of such a portrait was more important to the photographer than the identity of the family. The wearing of western clothing also met white expectations of the "civilizing" of Native Americans.

John B. Luddington (c.1855 (1860)-1926), born in Weitchpec, was the son of a white man, probably also named John Luddington from New York state and a Native American mother from Weitchpec. Neither is identified by name in census data. He was thus half Native American.⁴ Emma Anna Luddington (1864-1930), born in Warseck, was from the Charley family and of Yurok ancestry. They were married in 1881 and Warseck and Weitchpec are very close and small villages, so they probably knew each other from an early age. In the 1892 voter registration within a year of when this family photograph was taken, John B. is described as 6 feet tall, dark complexion, with grey eyes and black hair.⁵ He may at times have passed for a white man and never had an Indian allotment as many Native Americans. The couple had at least nine children, Alfred being the eldest son (1890-1908) and Fred (1893-1907) most likely pictured in the baby basket. Tragically they both died very young in their teens. The oldest daughter is Ellen (1882). She had a daughter, Agnes (Eva), with Oscar McCaride or Mcarty in 1900. Agnes is listed as living in the Luddington home in the 1900 census. Ellen later married Francis Colegrove in 1903. The other Luddington children are Alice (1885), John Jr. (1897), Bernard (1899), Gilbert (1902), Rose(bele) (1904 married Andrew Lewis), & Oliver (1910).⁶ Ellen and Alice are not in the picture and were probably at compulsory Indian school, which was usually required from the age of six.

³ This small postcard is at the Clarke Historical Museum. See Ron Johnson, Coleen Kelley Marks, & Susie Van Kirk, *Photographs of Native Americans of Northwest California*, p.23, fig. 20.

⁴ U.S. Census 1900, 1910, 1914, 1920.

⁵ 1892 Voter Registration

⁶ 1900 U.S. Census, Indian Population, Hoopa Valley Extension, pg. 312A, 1910 U.S. Census, May, Indian Population, Hoopa addition, Klamath River, pg. 37A, & 1920 U.S. Census, March Orleans, Humboldt Co. pg. 223B.

No documentary evidence has been found to substantiate who John Bernard Luddington's father was but the most likely possibility is John C. Lud(d)ington given the same last name and their similar height over six feet. Generally the height of six feet was quite exceptional in the 19th century and people were not as tall as today. John C. Luddington came from Sullivan County, New York and was educated like his father, Clinton V. R. Luddington. John C. Luddington and his brothers Charles and Harley obtained passports in 1849 and came to California a year or two later.⁷ John C. was a pioneer in Elk River Valley involved with lumber harvesting⁸ and then at the age of 21, with an older partner, Snyder, acquired 320 acres seven miles east of Union (Arcata) on the North East side of the Mad River.⁹ This was the first stop for pack trains heading east and later became Scottsville and eventually Blue Lake. He sold the property to his brother Charles in 1854 who in a couple of years sold it to Augustus Bates. John C. was well respected and ran for county Sheriff. He however met an untimely end in June 1858 when he was shot in the leg at a mine on the Salmon River he had sold to Thomas (A.) Maxwell from Trinidad. His leg was amputated by the so-called "Dutch Doctor" but the shock and after effects caused his death.¹⁰

According to voting records John B. Luddington was a packer in 1888 and laborer in 1892 at Martin's Ferry.¹¹ This is where the mule trains, mostly from merchants Alexander Brizard and William Lord, were ferried across the Klamath River. John B. Luddington's voting registration records present an anomaly since only white men were allowed to vote at this time and in later U.S. censuses he is listed as Indian. Then he turned to farming, which is his listed profession in 1896, 1900, 1910 and 1920. He spoke English but did not read or write it according to voter and census records. His children did read and write English so they undoubtedly went to Indian school. John did not have an Indian allotment of land but his wife and four children, Ellen, Alice, Alfred, and Fred did have allotments in land not very far from the Klamath River between Martins Ferry and Warseck, which they received in 1894. (Figure 2) In census documents after this date John

⁷ U.S. Passport Applications 1849.

⁸ Susie Baker Fountain, 56-189 & 119-329.

⁹ County Record A, 595.

¹⁰ *Humboldt Times*, July 3, 1858 & July 24, 1858.

¹¹ Voting Registration Records 1888 & 1892.

B. Luddington is answering yes to the question of owning a home and of being a farmer, but answering no to receiving an Indian allotment.¹²

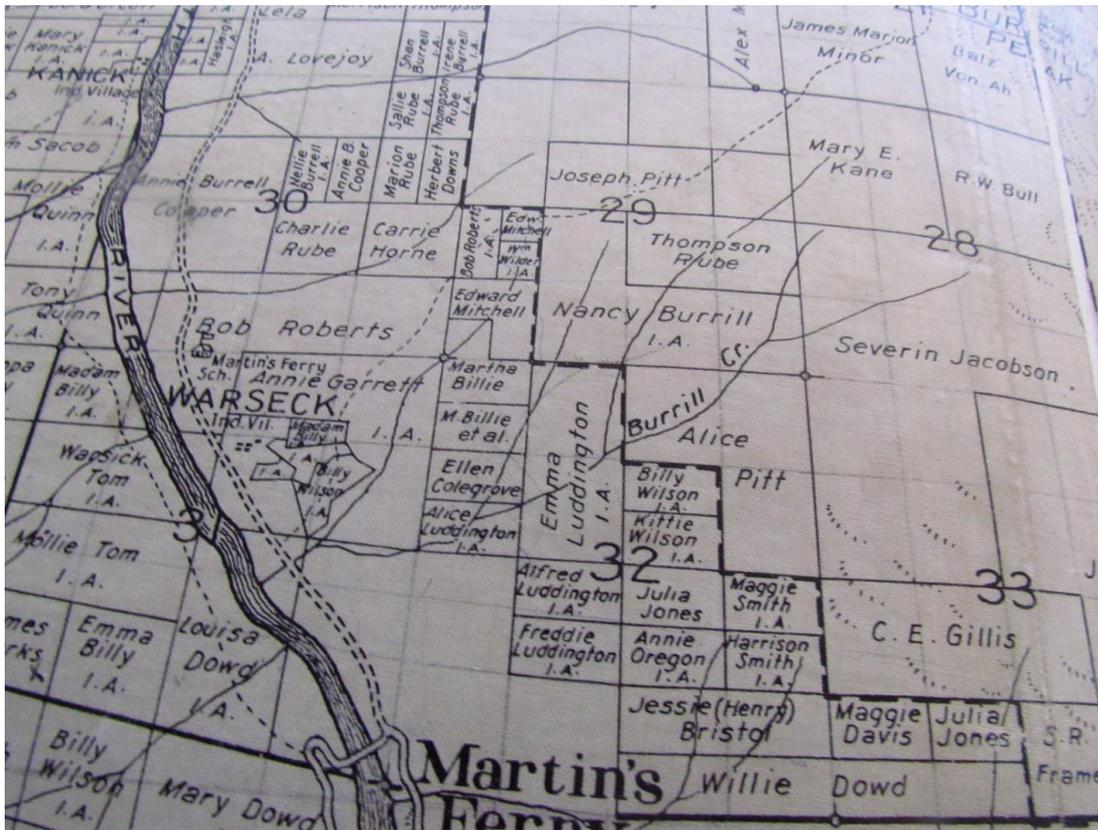


Figure 2. Map, Detail Showing Luddington Allotments, Belcher, 1921, Humboldt Historical Society

In contrast to A.W. Ericson’s early photograph, Grace Nicholson was interested in capturing the Luddingtons in ceremonial regalia (Figure 3 & 4) and they are dressed and posed accordingly. Grace Nicholson wrote in one of her notes in about 1923 that John Luddington explained the White Deer Skin Dance to her.¹³ In addition to being the most famous gallery dealer in Native American cultures she was deeply interested in Native American cultures and was self-educated to the level of most anthropologists. She regularly traveled from her home/gallery in Pasadena along the Klamath River beginning in 1906. When she took photographs

¹² There is another A.W.Ericson photograph that could be John B. Luddington in the Clarke Historical Museum, #2011.78.9. It has two children on a horse, a man, & presumably his wife with a baby. Although the man looks like John B. Luddington the woman is looking down so her face is mostly lost and the children do not easily match the dates of the ages of the Luddington children.

¹³ Grace Nicholson, Indian Notes, Huntington Library, San Marino

she sent copies back to those in them. When Nicholson wrote her note, most probably in 1923, John would have been in his late sixties. If she purchased any items from him is not known as her diaries have no mention of this. It is however likely given her usual pursuit of collectables.

What was discovered in the Nicholson archives at the Huntington Library are two photographs of John Luddington and his son Oliver and two of “Mrs. Luddington,” presumably Emma, wearing the same sash as John Luddington.¹⁴ (Figure 3 & 4)



Figure 3. Oliver and John Luddington, ca. 1923, Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino



Figure 4, Mrs. Luddington (Emma), Grace Nicholson, ca. 1923, Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino

She is wearing a woman's ceremonial cap, a pair of hair ties that are the flat type, not wrap-around braids, and the previously mentioned sash. The better of the two photographs of John & Oliver Luddington has a house in the background and they wear Jump Dance regalia. John and Oliver wear the piliated woodpecker Jump Dance headdresses. John holds two matching Jump Dance baskets. These would have been held by the side men in the dance and the center man would usually have a somewhat larger Jump Dance Basket. One wonders if these as well as Emma's cap were woven by her. There is no record of her being a basket weaver and Jump Dance baskets and women's ceremonial caps are considered the pinnacle of the basket weaving tradition. These photographs by Grace Nicholson some thirty years later than the Ericson photograph add a completely different dimension

to our limited knowledge of the Luddington family. Namely that despite their appearance in Ericson's photograph they had retained their commitment to their heritage and were proud to display it by explaining one of the most sacred ceremonial dances and posing in appropriate regalia for Nicholson. Thus their involvement with and pride in Yurok ceremonial regalia establish their Indian identity much differently than Ericson's family photograph.

Although many of the Luddington children died young, some married and their families in the Hupa and Yurok tribes are represented by the Colegrove, Lewis, McCardie, McConnell, Moon, Nixon, and other families.¹⁵ Many of these families carry on the traditions represented in these photographs.

14. I am indebted to Suzanne Oatey at the Huntington Library who alerted me to these photographs in response to my inquiry as to their possible existence given Nicholson's Indian note. E-mail, November 7, 2013.

15. Tony Platt has also been interested in the Ericson photograph and will possibly write an article featuring this photograph. I am deeply indebted to Susi van Kirk for archival research for this essay.