


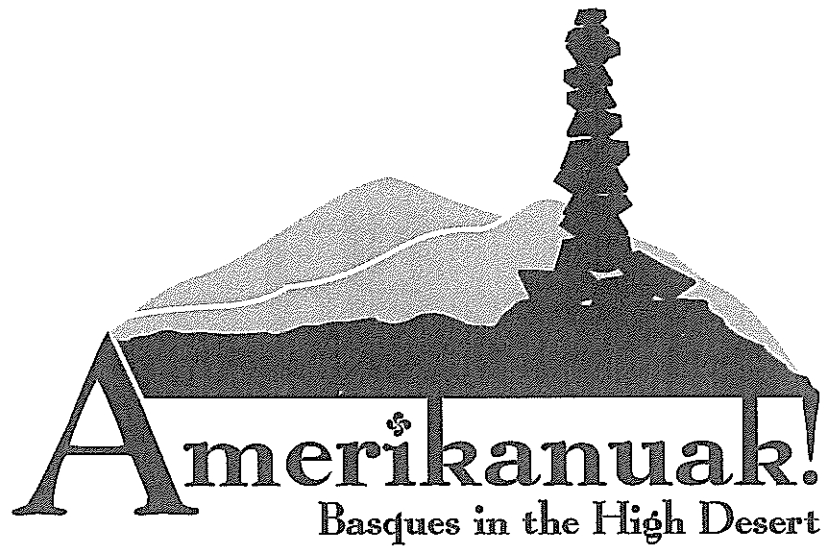


Amerikanuak!
Basques in the High Desert

THE HIGH DESERT MUSEUM
IDAHO HUMANITIES FOUNDATION



Cover: Basque sheepman Felix Urizar with Jess and Millie Ugalde in sheep camp near Andrews, Oregon, east side of Steens Mountain, 1938. Courtesy Gilbert Urizar, Burns, Oregon. Inside cover: Celebration in Basque boardinghouse, 1920s. Alcoria-Hasari Collection, Stockton, California. Back cover: Immigration document of Candido Arostegui, who traveled from Ez, Spain, province of Bizkaia, to Winnemucca, Nevada, in 1919 at age 15. Courtesy Frank Arostegui, Marysville, California.



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Text by Robert G. Boyd, William A. Douglass, Ph.D., Richard W. Etulain, Ph.D.,
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Acknowledgments

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William A. Douglass, Ph.D., Richard Etulain, Ph.D.,

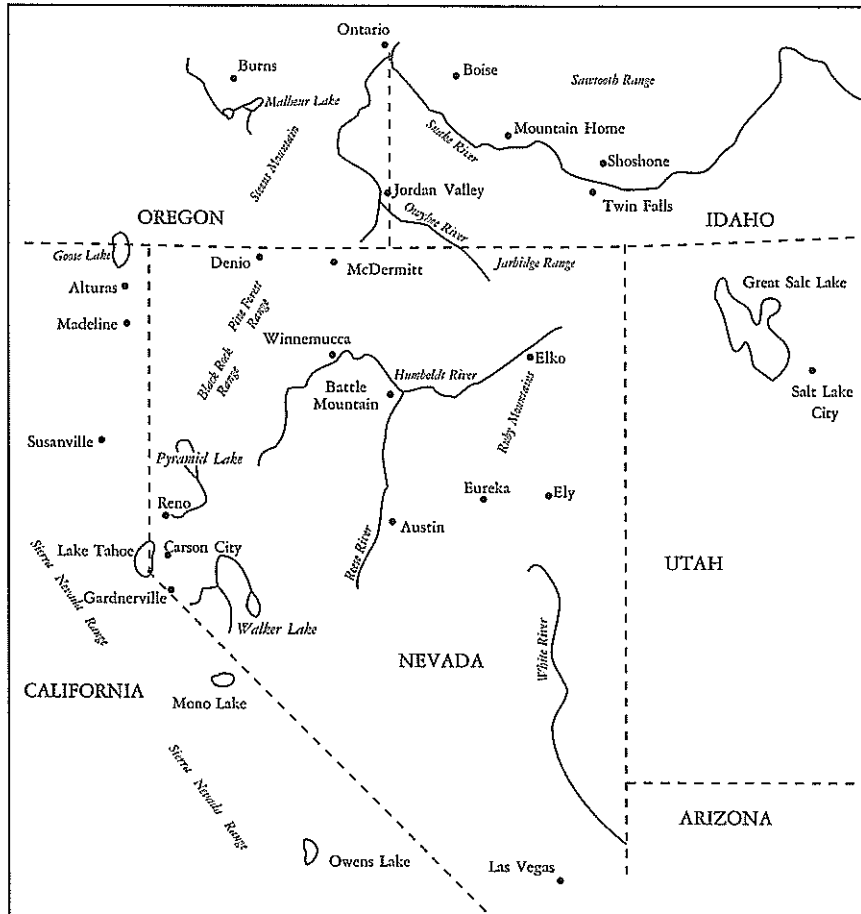
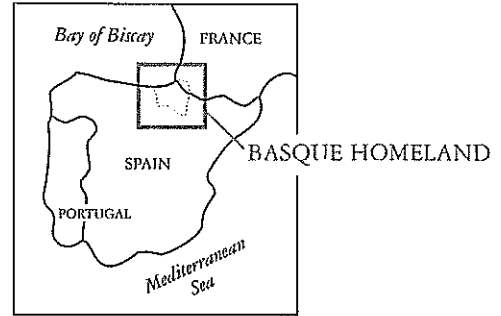
Jeronima Echeverria, Ph.D., Robert Echeverria and Steven Mendive provided critical advice and encouragement as exhibit consultants. Scholars and consultants from throughout the region who participated in the planning of the project's public programming were Linda White, Ph.D., Louis Attebery, Ph.D., Joe Eiguren, Arthur Hart, Ph.D, Pat Bieter, Ed.D., David Romtvedt, Barbara Perry Bauer, Jennifer Dicks, Jyl Hoyt, Robert Sims, Ph.D., and William Lang, Ph.D.

Robert Echeverria, President of North American Basque Organizations, provided ongoing consultation and planning assistance, and Basque-Americans across four states gathered family snapshots, allowing The High Desert Museum to amass a collection of over 300 previously unpublished images.



Basque Country

Europe and the American High Desert



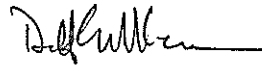
Foreword

The purpose of *Amerikannak! Basques in the High Desert* is to present a compelling and accessible portrait of the Basque experience in the American West. After several years of planning, the project took final form as a collaboration between The High Desert Museum and The Idaho Humanities Foundation. These two primary sponsors have cooperated with other public and nonprofit organizations, including three state humanities councils in Oregon, Nevada, and Idaho, four major museums, several public radio stations, and 20 public libraries to develop a multifaceted program for four western states.

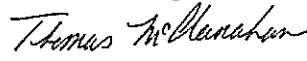
The components include a major exhibit and catalog designed and produced by The High Desert Museum. After a year at The High Desert Museum, this exhibit will travel to The Boise Basque Museum, The Northeastern Nevada Museum, The Fresno State Metropolitan Museum, and The Nevada State Museum. The primary exhibit is complemented by a traveling mini-exhibit, which will be placed at 20 rural libraries. The content of the exhibits and the essays included in this publication will be reinforced by several related com-

ponents, including scholarly presentations by historians, linguists, musicologists, and anthropologists; a series of public radio programs broadcast throughout the region; educational trunks for use in libraries and schools; and a collection of books on the Basque experience distributed to all participating libraries.

It is our hope that the efforts of all individuals and organizations involved in the project will lead to a more thorough understanding and appreciation of the Basques against the broader backdrop of the natural and human history of the American West.



Donald M. Kerr
President, The High Desert Museum



Thomas McClanahan, Ph.D.
President, The Idaho Humanities Foundation

Curator's Notes

Over the past decade, my curatorial role has provided me the opportunity to create exhibits on a variety of historic themes from the region. *Amerikannak! Basques in the High Desert* offered both unusual challenges and rewards.

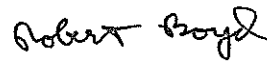
The goal was to tell the story of Basque immigrants to the West through a blend of authoritative text, historic artifacts and photographs of significant sites. We quickly found, however, that no catalogue of Basque sites existed, known collections contained few photographs of early life in the High Desert, and there appeared to be no artifacts available whatsoever through the auctions and antique stores that are the usual showcases for Americana.

The Museum's scholars and advisors on the project suggested that we turn to the Basque people themselves. From the very first phone calls to ranchers and townspeople across the region, my requests were met with support and enthusiasm. In follow-up visits, it was their notes on the map that led me to the sheep camps, groves of carved aspens, *harrimutlak*, or "stone boys," and other telling sites that are represented in Charles Blakeslee's fine color photography, and it was their stories that gave the exhibit its voice and continuity through the generations. Linda Dufurrena's wonderful images of the

Basque homeland strengthened this sense of continuity.

At the same time, Basque-Americans across four states gathered family snapshots for me to copy on my visits, allowing the Museum to amass a collection of over 300 previously unpublished images from which to draw for the exhibit and this catalogue. They also dug through their closets, cellars and attics for immigration papers, wedding attire, boarding-house furnishings, sheep camp equipment and many other irreplaceable and highly personal treasures from their family history.

Without the participation of the Basque community, this exhibit would not have been possible. On behalf of the Museum's staff, I wish to express my appreciation for the assistance, friendship and generosity shown by the Basque people and for their confidence in our project. *Amerikannak! Basques in the High Desert* is their story.



Robert G. Boyd
Curator of Western Heritage

Nor dira
Euskaldunak?

Who are the Basques?

by Robert G. Boyd, Curator of Western Heritage
The High Desert Museum

The Basques are a people with a homeland, but without a nation. They inhabit the region that includes the rocky coastline of the Bay of Biscay and the forests and granite crests of the Pyrenees Mountains. Thought by some to be Europe's most ancient people, possibly descendants of Cro Magnon Man, they are known to have lived there for at least 5,000 years. Historically, three regions of France and four provinces of Spain comprise the Basque country.

The Romans were the first to note these people, referring to them as a wild and independent tribe that spoke a distinctive language. The Basques weathered the Dark Ages in their mountain stronghold, watching the comings and goings of Goths, Franks, Normans and Moors, but never submitting to any invaders.

The Basques call themselves *Euskaldunak*, "the speakers of Basque." Their language, *Euskera*, is unique. Linguists and scholars have not been able to link it with any other known language. In Basque, almost all names for sharp tools derive from the word *aitz*, meaning stone. For example *aitz-tto* is the word for knife and *aitz-kor* for axe. Such clues have led many to believe *Euskera* is proof of a Paleolithic past. The Basque language is an important part of the identity of these people. It is a common bond surviving the tumult of foreign invasion and serving to maintain cultural unity even though their homeland has been divided between France and Spain for centuries.

In the atmosphere of relative independence, Basque culture and commerce flourished, reaching well beyond the homeland. Mariners set forth from seaports along the Bay of Biscay for whaling and cod fishing, venturing as far as the North American Grand Banks, Newfoundland and waters of the Arctic by the 15th century. Over half of Columbus' crew was reportedly Basque.

While the exploits of mariners were important to Basque history and a source of pride, the majority led an agricultural exist-

ence inland. In an era when many Europeans labored as serfs on feudal manors, the people of the Basque country lived a self-sufficient and independent life.

Between the coast and the high ridges of the Pyrenees stretches a verdant landscape of foothills and narrow river valleys. For hundreds of years, small villages have scattered the length of the valleys, serving as market places and municipal centers. Even today, the family farms, or *baserri*, generally occupy about 25 acres of valley floor and hillside. Families grow wheat, corn and apples, pasture dairy cattle, and raise pigs and chickens. The high-forested slopes of the valley are held in common so that each family can graze sheep, cut wood, harvest chestnuts and gather bracken ferns for animal bedding.

In the Basque country rural life still depends on crops, livestock and the skills required for self-sufficiency. In the past, what little cash was required came from transactions in the village market. It has always been a simple, and, at times, meager existence. There are Basques in America today who remember this way of life in vivid detail.

Marianne Etchart was born in 1900 in the village of Esternçuby, France. Her parents migrated to Nevada when she was a child, leaving her with her grandparents until she migrated to America at age 19. She remembers helping in the fields with the mules and donkey and tending sheep in the mountain pastures. She wore a long black dress, stockings she knitted herself, sandals in summer and wooden shoes in the winter. She recalls wash days in the river, stomping vats of grapes to make wine, driving the family lambs to St. Jean Pied de Port. Meals were simple. "At night we usually had cornbread and milk. Men, they had regular soup with meat. Lunch we had potatoes and bacon, ham and things like that. Oh, they live well, the women with cornbread and milk, and chestnuts in the wintertime. Every night chestnuts in the wintertime, and cheese. I used to sneak a lot of cheese in the afternoon."¹

Life on the family farm varied little, whether in France or Spain. Luciano Alacano was born in Spanish Basque country in 1900. Luciano went to school when there was no work on the farm, or when it rained.

"When I didn't go to school," he recalls, "I worked in the garden harvesting vegetables. The vegetables were picked up by a peddler and taken to the market. On the way home, the peddler would have bread which mother bought with the money she received from the vegetables. We raised all our food on the farm except bread, coffee and sugar. There were no checkbooks, only cash. People didn't put money in the bank, they would hide it in their homes. My mother hid her money under a rock in the house by the fireplace where she cooked. She put it in a rag and tied it with a string."²

"To be an authentic Basque there are three requisites: carry a sonorous name which states its origin, speak the language of the sons of Aitor, and . . . have an uncle in America."

—Pierre Lhande
L'Emigration Basque, 1909
from *Amerikanuak*
by William Douglass
and Jon Bilbao



The Mendiboure family, Irissarry, France, c. 1912. Pete Mendiboure Collection, Madeline, California

At festivals in rural areas, improvised verses are sung out in a traditional contest called *bertsoak*. The contestants, called *bertsolariak*, are quick-witted individuals with a sense of irony and humor who compete with one another in a debate of song, with the listening audience serving as judge. Extolling the virtues of the family farm is a typical theme, as in the following poem:

*Glorious Basque farms
Our airy foundations which
In the shelter of luxuriant trees
Smile;
The most esteemed and solid
Custodians of our language,
The best verses that spring
From me are for you!
. . . . Ob, city dwellers
Uncover your beads respectfully
When you go to the mountain,
Seeing the grand old farms face to face
I can exclaim without fear
In a joyful shout:
The Basque race will not be lost
As long as there are farms!*

Centuries of struggle to maintain a language, traditions and way of life have left a mark on the Basque character, a character that invaders, visitors, and scholars alike have long struggled to define.

In *A Book of the Basques*, Rodney Gallop took his turn at describing these people:

Here, as a framework on which to embroider, are some impressions of Basque character: loyalty and rectitude; dignity and reserve; independence and a strong sense of race and racial superiority; a serious outlook tempered by a marked sense of humor and capacity for enjoyment; deep religious feeling; and a cult of tradition amounting almost to ancestor worship; all of these correlated and directed by a deep-rooted simplicity and a courageous, objective view of life.

The character and customs of the Basques, which have endured since ancient times, would give these people strength in their new homeland—the American West. ■



The village of Errazu, province of Nafarroa, Spain. At the turn of the century, five brothers of the Dufurrena family left this village in the foothills of the Pyrenees to work as sheepherders in northern Nevada. Photography: Linda Dufurrena



Basques gather after church, Baigorry, France. Photography: Linda Dufurrena



Gernikako
Arbola
The Tree
of Gernika

This sacred oak stands in the center of Gernika and was the meeting place of the elected representatives of the province of Vizcaya in the 1400s. In 1936, Spain granted autonomy to the Basque country and their first president took his oath of office beneath the Tree of Gernika. Their independence as a people was short-lived with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the same year, destruction of Gernika by air bombardment and almost four decades of oppression under Franco's rule. The traditional Basque national anthem, *Gernikako Arbola*, takes its name from this legendary oak.

The destruction of Gernika was immortalized by Pablo Picasso's famous work, entitled "Guernica," the Spanish name for the village.

Basque Sheepherding

by William A. Douglass, Ph.D.

Professor and Coordinator of Basque Studies, University of Nevada-Reno

While Basques were involved in the early Spanish exploration and subsequent administration of parts of the American West, their discernible presence in the region dates from the California gold rush in 1849. By that time Basques were already established as sheepherders on the pampas of southern South America, many of whom joined the ranks of fortune-seekers to North America.

When most failed to find gold they turned their attention to livestock-raising. By the 1870s the first Basque herders had expanded their operations from cattle to sheep and had reached out from the seemingly vast open ranges of southern California into the bunchgrass rangeland and mountain meadows of the high desert country, an expansive region of the Intermountain West bordered generally by the Cascade Mountains on the west, the Rockies on the east, the Sierra Nevadas on the south, and the Columbia Plateau on the north. The high desert landscape is characterized largely by basin and range country as well as arid plateaus.

Sheepherding was a denigrated occupation in the American West. However, it required no knowledge of English and little formal education. What was more, it provided economic opportunity for ambitious men.

Most of the Basque men who tended itinerant bands of sheep in the High Desert considered their isolated life in the harsh and often hostile landscape only a temporary sojourn. Unlike immigrants who settled in urban ethnic ghettos or American small towns dominated by their own ethnic group, the young Basque entered one of the loneliest professions in the world. Herding sheep in the least populated reaches of the American West placed a man in a situation which at times bordered on total social isolation. In such a context there were formidable barriers to the formation of family life and assimilation into the American mainstream. Consequently, Basques, possibly more than any other immigrant group in American history, retained an orientation to their homeland. They viewed their stay as a kind of purgatory in which to acquire one's nest egg (built on monthly wages of between \$30-\$40) before returning to France or Spain.

One common but erroneous assumption about the Basques is that every immigrant from the Pyrenees had an extensive background in sheepherding. In point of fact there were few professional herders in the Basque Country itself and, ironically, practically none of them moved to the United States. Rather, what young Basque males brought to America was a rural upbringing that gave them some skill in caring for livestock, a propensity for hard work, and a willingness to undergo extreme hardship in order to advance financially. It was primarily in the High Desert, under the tutelage of an experienced herder, that the new arrivals learned how to herd sheep.

Basques were in the forefront of developing the pattern of transhumance which still characterizes sheep husbandry throughout much of the American West. Under this system of seasonal livestock movement, the sheep bands are winterized in the low-lying deserts, which are largely free from crippling snowfalls. They are summered in the high country of the Sierra Nevadas (in California and Nevada), the Sawtooths (in Idaho), the Bighorns (in Wyoming), and many other regional mountain ranges.

Transhumance could also be practiced by established, landed ranch outfits, but it did not really require such investment. As long as there was ample public range available, theoretically on a first-come basis, a man could move perpetually about the public lands caring for as many as 1,000 ewes and their lambs, accompanied only by a pack animal and a sheep dog. By the turn of the century such nomadic outfits, "tramps" to their detractors, were common throughout the American West. In several districts the competition between settled ranchers and transient sheep operators, mainly Basques, led to

*"My father was a
sheepherder, and his
home was the hills.
So it began when he
was a boy in the
misted Pyrenees of
France, and so it was
to be for the most of
his lifetime in the
lonely Sierra of
Nevada."*

—Robert Laxalt
Sweet Promised Land



Basque sheepman leading his mules loaded with camp equipment, northern Nevada, 1920s. Behind him is herder Urbano Pedroarena. Albert and Shirley Arena Family Collection, Alturas, California



Sheepman Tomas Alcorta with family and herders at spring lambing, Battle Creek, Oregon, April 1919. Bengochea-Alcorta Family Collection, Carson City, Nevada

litigation in the courts, anti-Basque sentiment in the press and even violence.

Beginning in the late 1890s and during the first decade of the 20th century, vast forested districts of the American West were either declared national parks (in which livestock grazing was prohibited) or national forests (in which livestock grazing permits were issued to American citizens and according to how much ranch land they held in private ownership). Both measures were touted in the region's press as victories over the "Basque tramp sheepmen."

The immediate practical consequence of these public policy changes was to further concentrate the transient bands onto the public range outside the reserves, some of which was still suitable as marginal summer range. In the unprotected districts, the problems that the reserve system was designed to address were simply exacerbated. It took nearly three decades, or until 1934 with passage of the Taylor Grazing Act, that the remaining unforested parts of the public lands were brought under effective federal control. The era of the nomadic Basque sheep band was over.

While many of the Basque herders continued returning to

Europe, by the turn of the century Basques in expanding numbers began to view the region as a permanent home. They increasingly took their wages in breeding stock, or they used their wages to purchase shares of the flock they tended. They started purchasing ranches in order to continue operating under the new federal policies. They became full or part owners—sheepmen—and continued the practice of bringing younger relatives over from the Pyrenees as herders. Growing numbers obtained U.S. citizenship, and trips to the homeland began taking the form of temporary visits, often with the primary purpose of finding a wife to return with them to America.

Over time, Basque sheepmen established themselves in close-knit communities such as Jordan Valley, Oregon, Mountain Home, Idaho, and Elko or Winnemucca, Nevada. Having already firmly built their reputation as the best sheepherders, Basques progressively increased their prominence in the ranks of camptenders, sheep foremen, livestock buyers, ranch owners and livestock transporters.

The nature of sheepherding, until well into the 20th century, made it an occupation primarily for the young and unmarried, many with little command of English and in need of a



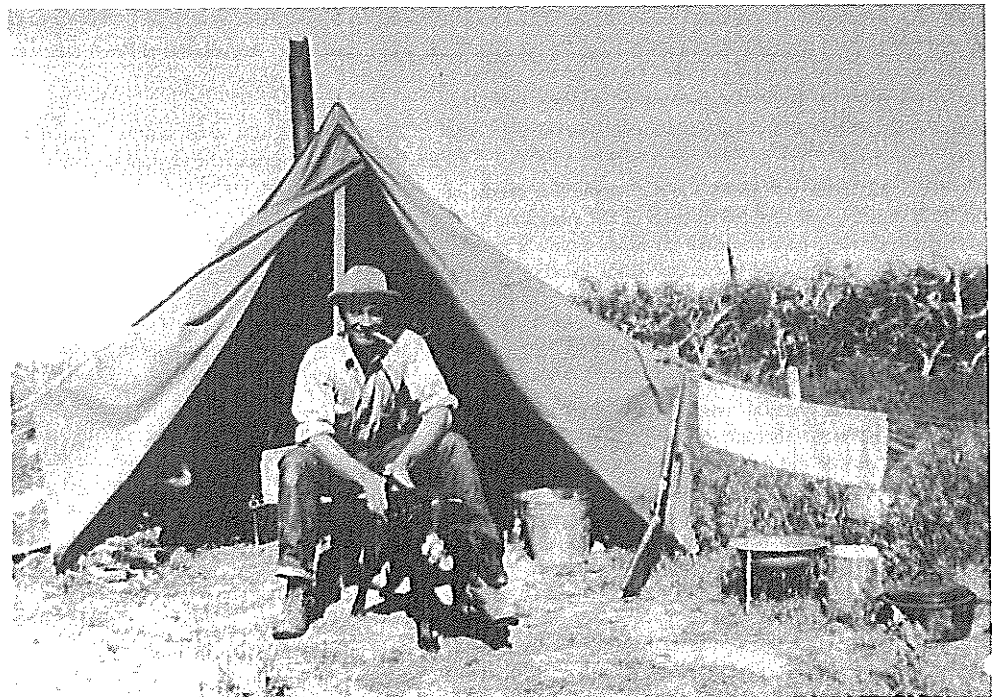
Aspen carving, high meadow of the Pine Forest Range, northern Nevada. This dance ball girl was carved by a Basque sheepherder in the 1920s. Women were frequently the subject of carvings in the quaking aspens, an indication of the herders' lonely existence and perhaps memories of their last visit to town. Photography: Charles Blakeslee



Ralph Barrutia in camp wagon, c. 1945. The wagon was home to the herder when moving bands of sheep from the winter range near Grandview, Idaho, to the summer range in the Sawtooth Mountains. Barrutia Family Collection, Mountain Home, Idaho.

place to find companionship and shelter. To serve the needs of these sheepherders, Basque boarding houses became a dominant enterprise and support mechanism in their communities. The owner of the boarding house served as interpreter, postmaster, medical advisor, and business consultant for Basque newcomers to the High Desert. Boarding houses also provided traditional music, held dances, and constructed *pelota* and *jai alai* courts for their patrons, making them the focus of social life in many Basque communities.

By the early years of the 20th century, successful Basque entrepreneurs were expanding their interests into mercantile and banking enterprises. In subsequent years, the work ethic, business integrity and success of Basques in a wide variety of walks of life resulted in their being viewed in the region as one of its unique cultural and economic assets. At the same time, leaders within the High Desert's Basque community began to



Alfonso Acordagoitia in sheep camp at Twin Lakes, west of South Mountain, Idaho, 1942. Costa-Acordagoitia Family Collection, Jordan Valley, Oregon.



Harrimutlak, or stone boy, desert west of Owyhee River, southeastern Oregon. Such stone cairns, built by herders to pass the time and mark their routes, were sometimes over six feet tall. Photography: Charles Blakeslee

promote special events and festivals celebrating Basque culture, and a body of literature on the Basque experience in the region began to emerge.

The combination of the closure of the public lands to itinerant sheepmen and the restrictive immigration laws severely curtailed the American West as a viable destination for intending Basque emigrants. By the 1940s, in part due to the manpower shortage occasioned by World War II, the sheep industry was experiencing a severe labor crisis. To help remedy this situation, the U.S. Congress passed a series of "Shepherd Laws" conferring permanent residence on Basques who were herding sheep as illegal aliens, as well as a series of enabling acts which exempted intending herders from the Spanish nationals' quota.

About that time sheepmen created the Western Range Association, the sole purpose of which was to recruit herders

(mainly in Spain) for three-year labor contracts in the American West. From 1950 until the mid-1970s the system worked reasonably well, introducing several thousand sojourning Basques into the United States. However, a combination of the struggle over access to the public lands between ranchers and environmentalists, which further limited the livestock grazing permits, and the improved economic condition in the Basque country, which made a shepherd's wage unattractive, reduced the demand for herders while shifting the recruiting efforts of the Western Range Association toward Latin America (Mexico, Peru and Chile). By the mid-1970s there were fewer than 100 Basque shepherders in the entire American West. At the same time, many Basque ranchers either sold out or converted from sheep to cattle. After a century and a half of serving as one of the prime architects of the rural economy of the American West, the era of the Basque sheepman (defined broadly) was all but over. ■

A Temporary Destination

Although the isolated work as herders may have caused the Basques to retain an extraordinarily strong tie to their homeland, in many respects they were like other immigrants who viewed the United States as a temporary destination.

Some historians estimate that as many as one-third of the nearly 30 million foreigners who arrived between the Civil War and World War I moved back to their native countries. In 1908, for example, a time of world-wide economic depression, a quarter more Italians went home than arrived in the U.S. Those who did stay sent home four out of every five dollars they earned.

—Frederick Rose,
"Muddled Masses," *Wall
Street Journal*, April 26,
1995, pp. A1, A6.

Translating the Culture

by Linda White, Assistant Coordinator, Basque Studies Program, University of Nevada-Reno
and Thomas McClanahan, Ph.D., President, Idaho Humanities Council

In 1912, at the age of 23, Beltran Paris crossed the United States by train after sailing to New York from Paris. A cardboard sign on his beret announced his destination—“Gillette, Wyoming.” In many respects Beltran’s life was a microcosm of the Basque experience in the American West.¹ Like many rural Basques he was functionally illiterate, with no formal schooling. Until joining the French army three years earlier, he had spoken only one Basque dialect and had never traveled more than a short distance from his birthplace in a small, border town in the French Basque country. He followed four cousins, all of whom

were shepherders in Wyoming. His original intent was to save 10,000 francs then return to his hometown to Basse Navarre, but after Beltran decided to make his home in the United States, and after he started to expand his business operations, he was compelled to learn English, a language which bore almost no structural resemblance to his native tongue.

The challenges of learning a new language faced by Basques like Beltran mirror those faced by waves of non-Basque immigrants. However, there are important linguistic considerations, complicated by historical and political developments, which make the Basque experience in the American West noteworthy and which help to explain some unique aspects of the assimilation process in the Basque community. One primary consideration is the uniqueness of *Euskara*, the Basque language, which is unrelated to other language groups. Another distinguishing characteristic relates to the variety of dialects, which influenced settlement patterns and which continue to complicate contemporary language preservation efforts. A third factor has to do with the kind of economic opportunities available to early Basques in the western United States. And political developments dating back centuries, but finding emphatic expression in Generalissimo Francisco Franco’s fascist regime in Spain, clearly have had a significant impact on Basque culture, particularly its linguistic heritage.

Euskara has been the foundation of Basque cultural identity since before the Roman Empire. It is a language family unto itself, unrelated to the Indo-European language group that includes the Romance, Slavic, and Germanic languages, including English. Some linguists have attempted to build bridges from Basque to Georgian, or Basque to Quechua, and even Basque to Finnish, but no one has put forth enough evidence to cause the linguistic community to agree on a clear relationship between Basque and any other language.

Because of the lengthy history of the Basques on the Iberian Peninsula, one of the strongest theories about the language is that it originated *in situ*. Basque would then be one of the oldest languages of the region and possibly the original Iberian tongue.

Anyone who has attempted to learn Basque as a second language is familiar with some of the more obvious difficulties that arise when dealing with a lan-



Basque immigrant shepherders, including Thomas Dufurrena (front left) taken shortly after their arrival in Reno about 1900. Margaret Dufurrena Stephen, Denio Nevada

“To me, the most important element of Basque culture is language. There is an old Basque saying: “Euskera barik ez dago euskaldunik,” which means: “Without Basque (language) there are no Basques.” All other aspects of the Basque culture are essential, yet to me they are secondary to the language.”

—Joe Eiguren
Writer, Historian
and Linguist



Possibly the first Basque class in the United States, begun by Joe Eiguren of Boise in 1963.

guage that is as different from English as Japanese or Swahili. The word order is usually backward from English, subjects of transitive verbs carry an ergative marker to distinguish them from subjects of intransitive verbs, and the Basque verb is a world unto itself, containing complexities of meaning that English speakers need verbs, prepositions, subject pronouns, and direct and indirect object pronouns to express.

The inherent structural difficulties of the language are further complicated by a variety of Basque dialects, including *Biscayan*, *Gnïpuzcoan*, *Labourdin*, *Zuberoan*, *Low Navarrese*, and *Batua*. *Navarrese* and *Alavese* are examples of dialects that are spoken as little as one hundred years ago but are virtually lost today. The dialects with the largest numbers of speakers are *Biscayan* and *Gnïpuzcoan*, but the dialects on the French side of the border--*Zuberoan*, *Labourdin*, and *Low Navarrese*--still have their speakers. And virtually every village has its own variations of vocabulary and grammar.

In the United States, the abundance of distinct Basque dialects contributed to communication problems among early immigrants to the High Desert. Given the preponderance of serial migration, it also helped to define the geographic distribu-

tion of various Basque communities. Consider Beltran's experience:

All of the herders and campenders...were Basques....but there were different kinds of Basques. Maybe half of the men were French Basques and the rest were Spanish. The French boys were coming all the time because there were a couple of French Basque campenders from Aldudes....

There were some Spanish guys, Navarros, in the outfit too. They were from Navarra which is right on the French line. Some of them know Basque and theirs is pretty close to ours. But some of those Navarros didn't know any Basque at all and we called them Castellanos. The French Basques and the Navarros stayed together a lot. But then there were the Vizcainos, Spanish Basques from Vizcaya. They were different. They talk a lot and are pretty loud. I really don't know how to say it, but you can tell the difference....They pretty much stayed together. Their Basque is a lot different than ours and at first I couldn't understand them. I first met Vizcainos on the boat and when they talked I knew it was Basque because I under-

stood a few words here and there, but that was all. Anyway, after I was in this country for a few years I got used to that Basque, too. There is another kind of Spanish Basques, Guipuzcoanos, from Guipuzcoa. There were only a few Guipuzcoanos in the United States. Their Basque was easier for me to understand than the Vizcaino.²

According to anthropologist William Douglass, Basques of the American West were distributed into two distinct colonies which “had little to do with one another and at times even manifested mutual and low-key hostility.” These divisions could be distinguished in large measure by the dialects spoken. French Basques and Spanish Navarrese Basques predominated in California, parts of Nevada, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana. Spanish Vizcayan Basques were almost exclusively in southwestern Oregon and Idaho. Northern Nevada was “a transition zone” with a mixed population representative of all regions of the Basque Country.³

One of the primary challenges to the Basque language, which provided perhaps the most fundamental unifying element in political autonomy, resulted from Franco’s campaign against its use in the *ikasolak*, schools where all subjects are taught in the Basque language. Franco’s government outlawed the teaching and use of *Euskara*, imposing severe penalties on those who attempted to keep it an integral part of Basque culture. At least in their intent, these measures were similar to those used by England to eliminate the Irish language or to attempts by the U.S. government to discourage the use of Native American languages. Over time, in combination with the loss of large numbers of native speakers through emigration, the widespread use of Basque declined significantly.

In the post-Franco era, which saw the legalization of the *ikasolak*, the Basques faced other equally formidable challenges to language preservation. One key problem, illustrated in Beltran’s description of his encounters with other Basques in America, was the number of dialects. The greater Basque community came to realize that in order to promote the language efficiently a standard dialect was needed to ensure that children would learn the same language in school and that publications would use uniform vocabulary and spelling. To this end the organization called *Euskaltzaindia* (The Academy of the Basque Language) came into being.

Since the 1950s *Euskaltzaindia* has been charged officially with the unification of the Basque language. This task has proven to be enormous, and many tensions have been generated by the choices forced by unification. Although the standardization of spelling still continues, the Biscayans felt especially slighted because the model for the Unified Basque verbs came from Guipuzcoan and the French Basque dialects. The “h” presents an especially thorny problem. The unified dialect, or *Batua*, uses less “h” than the northern dialects, but not as few as either *Guipuzcoan* or *Biscayan*. In spite of all the problems

inherent in creating a man-made dialect, the members of *Euskaltzaindia* have been reasonably successful in creating *Batua*. It is now one of the two official languages of the Basque Government (Spanish is the other), and it is taught in Basque schools from preschool to university. A Basque student can now complete his or her education entirely in *Batua*.

Another key organization, known as *HABE* (*Helduen Alfabetatze Berruskalduntzerako Erakundea*), is dedicated to the teaching of the Basque language to those who have lost it or to those whose ancestors never spoke it. *HABE* also focuses on teaching those who grew up speaking the language but never learned to read or write it. An entire generation of Basques who lost the language because of Franco’s oppression are being given the opportunity to embrace it again. However, many Basque Americans are skeptical that *Euskara* will continue to serve as the primary defining characteristic of Basque culture in the U.S.:

I think that, as immigration has basically stopped, in one or two more generations the Basque language will not be an important ingredient of whatever being Basque in Idaho will mean....the language will be inevitably lost in its primary function as a means of communication, and the Basque identity will have to be based on other elements....⁴

In recent years linguistic activists in the Basque country have concentrated more and more energy on educating young Basques in their native language. As a result the number of speakers is growing. Second and third generation American Basques are also rediscovering their ancestors’ language. However, in spite of all the energetic activity of *HABE* and the *ikasolak*, there remains a frighteningly small pool of native speakers, who are necessary to the survival of a language. These language preservation and expansion efforts have been complemented and stimulated by exchange programs meant not only to promote language instruction *per se*, but also to strengthen the cultural ties between European and American Basques. The rationale is that as these connections are solidified, interest in Basque language preservation will rise. Whenever possible, exchange programs draw on the skills and knowledge of elderly Basques who learned *Euskara* as their first language. One such tour took place in the summer of 1955. Thirty people from the Basque country traveled with a native speaker who had lived continuously in the High Desert for 43 years. That native speaker was Beltran Paris. ■

¹ William A Douglass, *Beltran: Basque Sheepman of the American West* (University of Nevada Press, Reno and Las Vegas, 1979), p. xiii.

² Douglass, pp. 39–40.

³ Douglass, p. 40.

⁴ Joseba Chertudi, *Ematik Nor? (From Here to Where?)*, p.4.

Basque Boardinghouses

by Jeronima Echeverria, Ph.D.

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“Every winter the sheepherders would come to stay. They had no home, except the hotel. They would play cards and see the girls, spend their money, then go back to herding for another year.”

—Claudio and Jesusa Yzaguirre, partners in the Winnemucca Hotel 1965—1973

Before beginning a new life as a herder or housekeeper in the High Desert, a young man or woman had first to span an ocean and a continent. The trans-Atlantic crossing and ensuing train ride traversing America took place in a land whose geography, customs, language and cuisine were unfamiliar and at times intimidating. As the transcontinental railways deposited young Basques at their final railway destination—perhaps Elko, Shoshone, or Alturas—the dry desert wind that greeted them also carried a flurry of new experiences to surprise them: buckaroos in chaps, cowpokes in stiff-brimmed Stetsons, and Mexicans, Chinese, and Native Americans in traditional dress, all of whom were speaking in a strange language.

However, luckier Basques were greeted with the familiar sound of their native tongue. To the newly arrived herder, housekeeper, or family member who had just endured a long and most likely lonely journey, someone shouting “*Euskaldunak emen badira?*” (“Are there any Basques here?”) must have been a very welcome sound and sight. Because trains arriving from the east were few in number and fairly reliable, *hoteleros* (hotelkeepers) often made it their habit to send a relative or co-worker over to the station to greet the train and escort the newcomer back without complication. In towns where the *ostatuak* (boarding houses) were well-known throughout the

region or when the hotel stood across the street from the train station in plain view, like the Landas boardinghouse in Ogden, Utah, for example, the courtesy of sending greeters was not followed.

Upon entering the boardinghouse, the traveler was once again surrounded with the familiar. Whether it was The Martin in Winnemucca, Nevada, Letemendi’s in Boise, Idaho, or Osa’s in Burns, Oregon, the sojourner found his or her language spoken, familiar food and drink as well as a hotelkeeper who was likely to make the transition from Old World to New as smooth as possible.

In the *ostatuak*, the newcomer discovered a number of provided conveniences. In some instances, *hoteleros* arranged employment for herders and then sent for them in the Old Country. If a Basque did not have a job upon arrival, the hotelkeeper was likely to set about in search of work for him in the community, on a neighboring ranch, or with a sheep outfit in the area. In the meantime, the hotelkeeper extended liberal credit, room, and board in exchange for the newcomer’s future business and eventual repayment.

Basques traveling from one hotel to another between 1890 and 1920 would have noticed that the physical layout of the *ostatua* throughout the American West was fairly consistent. The larger boardinghouses in sizeable towns were usually two-story buildings with kitchen, bar, dining hall, and card or parlor rooms occupying the first floor. Private quarters for the hotelkeeper and his family were often found near the first story near the kitchen, toward the back of the building. The second and possibly third stories contained dormitory-style rooms for boarders and hotel employees. Bathing facilities were most often found at the front and back of long hallways that halved the upper floors. Breezes, the direction of sunlight, and street and kitchen noises often affected room selection. Long-term boarders usually took the favored rooms, leaving the others to the less frequent visitors. In more recent decades, some *ostatua* also offered individual rooms with wash basins.

If exploring the lower floor or cellar of the boardinghouse, the newcomer might have discovered storage areas for food-stuffs, a wine cellar, a tool shed, and an area where Basque sausages and other meats were salted and dried. Outside, along one side of the building, there might have been a handball or *jai alai* court for weekend afternoon tournaments. And, alongside the other exterior walls, there might have been a vegetable garden, a stable for boarders’ horses, and a livery.

Of course, there are also examples of smaller one-story and two-story boardinghouses throughout the West. In Ontario



Star Hotel, Elko, Nevada. Built in 1910 by Pete Jauregui, this 22-room hotel provided a winter home to sheepherders for over half a century. Its dining room continues to serve Basque American meals in a fashion little changed for 80 years. Photograph from: Sol Silen, *La Historia de los Vascongados en el Oeste de los Estados Unidos*, New York, 1917.



The Arena family in front of the Buena Vista Hotel, 1945. Operating a Basque hotel involved the efforts of the entire family. Urbano worked at his blacksmith shop during the day and tended bar at night. Son Albert helped with chores after school. Mary cooked and supervised housekeeping with the help of daughter Elvira. Albert and Shirley Arena Collection, Alturas, California

and Crane, Oregon, for example, there was only one comparatively compact *ostatna* in town, and each were residences turned into boardinghouses. The *ostatna* operated by the Ueberuagas on Grove Street in Boise, Idaho, is the most well-known example of this phenomenon. In recent years it became the first Basque Museum in the United States. And, finally, there are also numerous examples of Basque families who "took in boarders" throughout Basque-American communities in the West.

Single male Basques who had come to North America to work in the burgeoning sheep industry comprised the majority of *ostatuak* boarders. Thus, the seasonal nature of the sheep industry dominated the workings of the Basque boardinghouses. In the summers, while on the high mountain ridges of the Owyhees, Sierra Nevadas, or Rockies, for example, a herder might individually tend up to a thousand ewes and lambs, but in the fall, lambs were sold, and the remaining ewes were grouped into winter bands. Consequently, about one half of the herders were released until the next lambing season, and many came into town, rented rooms in the *ostatuak*, and began looking for additional work. Whether they were on the range or in boardinghouses, herders used the *ostatuak* as their permanent mailing address and as a storage facility for their Sunday suit and extra gear. Many a hotel set a room aside for storing bedrolls, suits, camping gear, dated mail, and personal papers. Moreover, if a herder was injured on the job and needed to recuperate, his boss was likely to send him to the nearest Basque

hotel for care. Finally, upon retirement, many elderly herders made the boardinghouses their home.

In addition to providing a family-like atmosphere for the bachelor herder and becoming the herder's home away from home, the *ostatuak* served other important functions for Basque-American families. Wives living on remote ranches would come to stay at the hotels during the last stages of their pregnancies and frequently gave birth there. Not uncommonly, outlying Basque ranchers sent their children to the hotels to board during the school year. Moreover, special occasions such as marriages, family celebrations, dances and wakes often took place in the *ostatuak*. For example, many Basques report that all local Basques were expected to gather at their favorite boardinghouse to help their friends and family celebrate birthdays, anniversaries, and good news.

Basque hotelkeepers also welcomed and hired young women who came from the Old Country to work as serving girls and housekeepers. Oftentimes, once a herder had established himself financially in America, he began to look for a potential wife among these serving girls. Thus, the *ostatuak* provided the members of the Basque community with a place for meeting and courting. Many a Basque-American will recall meeting his or her prospective bride or husband in the dance halls, card parlors, and handball courts of their local boardinghouse. This occurred so frequently throughout the Great Basin and American West that experts have referred to the *ostatuak* as Basque "marriage mills."

Often Sunday was the day to visit the local hotel. Basques from outlying areas packed up their families and, depending upon available transportation, made their way to their favorite *ostatna*. There they might share a Sunday meal, cheer a handball or *jai alai* match, play a few rounds of *mus*, a card game, or attend a dance. For many hotelkeepers, Sunday was both dreaded and anticipated, for it was the most profitable day of the week and yet required the most intense work. As one *hosteleira* stated, "Sundays were our best days but they were also our toughest."

Whether a new arrival or an oldtime friend, Basques and Basque-Americans came to rely on their favorite *ostatuak* as "home away from home," for they provided familiar Old World culture, language, food, and customs in a new setting. The 12 boardinghouses found in Boise in 1922, or the seven found in Los Angeles in 1910, or the 17 different *ostatuak* that sprang up in Stockton between 1900 and 1950, or the hundreds of others were all part of a critical chapter in Basque-American history—one which provided a place for newcomers in the American West to ease their transition into new surroundings while still maintaining ties with their Basque homeland. ■

Basque Pioneer Women

by *Jeronima Echeverria, Ph.D.*

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"These were the best years of my life...we worked very hard, we played very hard, and I was very happy."

—Lyda Esain

From the peak years of Basque migration to the present day, Basque women have made a distinctive mark on the landscape of the American West. Certainly, Basque women (*Eskaldun andreak*) have played a greater part in the survival of early Basque communities than Basque-American literature suggests. All too often, such literature features the "lonely Basque shepherd" who roamed the American West with his band of sheep. While it is true that a majority of Basques arriving at the turn of the century were men who intended to herd for a few years and then return to *Euzkadi* (the Basque country), many changed their minds and decided to put down roots in the New World. In these cases the Mirentxus, Graciannas, and Maria Josefas whom they courted and married in the American West—or whom they brought back from the villages of their homeland—became a critical part of Basque-American communities.

The sheep industry in which the Basque bachelor had staked his fortune relied on an elaborate support system for its success, provided in great part by a Basque boardinghouse network which developed along the North American railway system and in part by the Basque women working in those

boardinghouses. During the earliest decades of Basque immigration to the United States from about 1860 through 1910, Basque men were particularly reliant on the boardinghouses, especially in the absence of a family life of their own. As the network of boardinghouses connecting the eastern seaboard to the American West became established, the demand for young Basque women to work as serving girls, housekeepers, and cooks in the boardinghouses skyrocketed.

By the 1920s, a female domestic labor market had been established alongside the market for bachelor herders. Margarita Aramaio Osa, for example, arrived in the United States in 1918 with a contract to work at Barbero's boardinghouse in Boise, Idaho. Her pay was to be eighteen dollars per month, but her duties would be multiple. Like other maids in the boardinghouses, she rose at sun-up, cleaned rooms and laundry, helped with odd jobs and errands at the boardinghouse, and served lunch and dinner to the boarders. Another contemporary, Lucy Aboitz Garatea, began working at the age of fifteen at Zapatero's Aguirre Hotel in Boise. Margarita and Lucy have both recalled developing "housemaid's knees"



Catherine and John Etchart at their Tampico ranch home near Glasgow, Montana, about 1940.

from crawling on floors and stairways while shining them to their boss's satisfaction. Given the rigors of boardinghouse work, it is not surprising that a majority of these young women left the boardinghouses after two or three years of service.

In fact, the two-year work cycle that many young Basque women endured was complemented by the Basque bachelor's desire to court, marry, and raise a family in the New World. But he did not necessarily intend to give up shepherding to marry. Instead, many set up homes in small towns, or on ranches just outside of towns, which they left on a seasonal basis for pasturing their herds in the mountain passes. In *Sweet Promised Land and Hotel*, for example, author and son of Basque immigrants Robert Laxalt described how his mother Marie stepped in to run family business matters, discipline children, operate a small boardinghouse, and generally keep things going while "Papa" was in the sheepcamps.

Marie was not unlike other Basque women who have been accustomed to playing a major role in their family's economic life. When Stockton-Los Banos sheepman Talbot was on the range, his wife Elena Celayeta Talbot comfortably took up managing their business affairs in town, overseeing repairs and maintenance on ranch property and machinery, and often driving the camp tender's truck to supply outlying shepherds and their bands. This tradition of "stepping in" is quite familiar to men and women in the Basque Country, where wives have taken on major economic responsibilities in their family's lives for centuries. In the Old World, wives and mothers in the fishing villages of Viscaya and Guipuzcoa have for centuries been accustomed to running their households without their husbands during the



Catalina Elordi Eiguren, wife of Basque sheepman Pascual Eiguren, with son Fred at the family ranch, Arock, Oregon, 1918. Eiguren Family Collection

Cipriano and Juanita Barrutia were married in the Basque country in 1921. Arriving in Mountain Home, Idaho, the young couple slept on the desert floor until they had saved money for a tent. All of their children were raised in sheep camps rather than in town, which was more common. Barrutia Family Collection. Mountain Home, Idaho



four and five month cod and tuna seasons. Thus, taking up men's work in the New World would not seem unusual to the Basque-American woman.

It has been argued by many that Basque women have been particularly adept at eschewing traditional female roles when necessary. An example is the story of John and Catherine Etchart. In 1912, John returned to his hometown of Aldudes to marry his sweetheart and bring her back to his ranch in the plains southwest of Glasgow, Montana. Years later, Catherine recalled wondering "What have I gotten myself into?" as she and John rode onto their expansive ranch for the first time. Such vast expanses, the distance from their cabin to the next neighbor's place, and the thousands of grazing sheep were all unfamiliar and somewhat intimidating sights to her.

Nonetheless, for two years, Catherine made their log cabin her home, cooking for passers-by including trappers, herders, and business associates. She began learning to work a ranch, including butchering and salting meats, preserving fruit, washing clothes by scrubboard, fencing pastures, and raising a vegetable garden, as well as four sons. Despite John's protestations that she was working too hard, and the fact that he had hired a cook, Catherine took her place at the stove alongside the hired girl. When John built a stone house in the Pyrenean style of her hometown, Catherine knew Montana was to be her permanent home and she embraced it with a passion. When John died in 1943, Catherine chose to remain on the ranch, taking over the books for the ranching operation and actively managing their properties until her death at the age of 90.

As one would imagine, many have heaped accolades on this Basque pioneer woman. For example, one herder remembered, "We'd always stop at the Etchart house, that was the custom of the day. Mrs. Etchart was like a mother to us." Or another, "When I came to America, I was sick. She put me to bed right there in their home. She brought me food all day, just like I was her own son. She was a real lady, Mrs. Etchart, you'll never see another one like her."

While Catherine Etchart was unique in many ways, there are ways in which she was similar to other Basque pioneer women. That is, she played a critical role in family financial matters, in raising children in a new land, and in the development of the Basque-American community in her area. Among Montana Basques, Catherine became a matriarch. By looking out for younger Basques new to the community, she played a major role in the formation of that community.

Similarly, in Basque-American communities throughout the West, other women have assumed the role of community matriarchs. *Hoteleras* in established boardinghouses like Letemendi's in Boise, Martin's in Winnemucca, or Elu's in San Francisco, were often called upon to provide assurance for Basques trying to understand their new homeland. Lyda Esain in Fresno and Gracianna Elizalde in Bakersfield became *hoteleras* at an early age and, together with their husbands, established successful businesses that survived in those towns for decades.

It was not simply that The Basque Hotel in Fresno or The Noriega in Bakersfield were successful business ventures that makes them worthy of note. Not even that they became centers where local Basques came to discuss topics ranging from the price of wool to national sports and news, nor that they came there to celebrate and mourn together. What distinguishes them is that the *hoteleras* who had spent 35 and 43 years of their respective lives living and working in those boardinghouses established themselves as trusted confidants and cornerstones of their community. If one wanted confidential advice, emotional support, or even a loan, he or she would often consult Lyda or Gracianna before speaking to members of his or her own family. Despite the potential burden of serving her community in this way for a lifetime, one of these modest matriarchs summarized her life in the following way: "These were the best years of my life . . . we worked very hard, we played very hard, and I was very happy." The role of matriarch—whether it be granted to a *hotelera* like Lyda or Gracianna, or to a *ranchera* like Catherine Etchart—was critical to the successful nature of Basque-American communities throughout the American West. These highly visible examples of *Euskal andra pioneroak* in the West, together with their less well known female counterparts, have made a distinctive mark on the region's landscape. ■

Music and Dance

by David Romvedt

Writer, lecturer and music historian

*"I decided to teach dancing classes to the children and older people. I could see things slipping away. It broke my heart to think that the children were growing up not knowing how to dance."*⁵

—Jay Hormaechea

Like many cultural groups, Basque immigrant communities around the world have kept alive a vigorous performance tradition in which music and dance are markers of ethnic pride and identity. The importance of these art forms in the continuance of a distinct people is partly seen in the fact that Basque folkloric dance performances, like the Basque language, were outlawed for the first twenty-five years of the Franco government in Spain. Such dances were perceived by Franco as inflammatory of nationalist or separatist sentiments.

Just as the Basque language has been maintained primarily through oral transmission, so has traditional Basque music. Only in the 19th and 20th centuries have written collections of Basque music been made. Clearly, the early music had spiritual power and marked major occasions in the lives of individuals and communities, but that tells us very little about either the nature or meaning of the music.

There are three ancient Basque musical instruments that give some sense of musical continuity in the American West and the Basque country, *Euskadi*. The first is the *Txistu*, a three holed end-blown pipe which is held and fingered by the left hand while the right hand keeps time on a small drum that is suspended from the bent elbow of the left arm. The second

instrument is the *Alboka*, a double-tubed cane pipe. The *Alboka's* tubes are joined along their length, and each tube has a reed on one end. The reeds are enclosed in a cow horn, which serves as the mouthpiece of the instrument. *Alboka* players use circular breathing to produce a continuous sound somewhat like that of a bagpipe. The third instrument is the *Dulzaina*, a double-reed, wind instrument with an intense, penetrating sound. Two *Dulzainas* are usually played together accompanied by a third musician playing a drum.

While the *Txistu*, *Alboka* and *Dulzaina* are among the oldest Basque musical instruments, the instruments most associated with traditional Basque music and dance today—both in the Basque homeland and in emigrant communities—are the diatonic button accordion and the more recently developed piano accordion.

The button accordion was invented in 1825 and was probably in use in *Euskadi* by the mid-to-late 19th century. Although its introduction met with opposition—those who disliked the accordion called it *infernuko auspoa* (the Devil's bellows)—it quickly became the center of community music. It was loud, sturdy and capable of playing rapid complex melodies. It could also accompany itself with both chords and

Juanita "Jay" Hormaechea scolds a Basque herder for his inept dancing at the Shepherders' Ball, Boise, Idaho, 1937. It was scenes like this that inspired Jay to begin teaching traditional dance classes in an effort to preserve traditional Basque dancing in this country.
Juanita Hormaechea Collection





Jimmy Jausoro performs at the opening of Amerikannak! Basques in the High Desert at The High Desert Museum in May 1994. He has performed traditional Basque music for almost half a century.

rhythm.

One of the forms of music that developed following the introduction of the button accordion was *Trikitixa*. The word is onomatopoeic for the push-pull breathing sound of the button accordion and came to mean both the instrument itself and the style of duet music made by a button accordion and a *Pandero* (tambourine). In *Trikitixa* music the *Pandero* is played with the fingertips so as to produce a glittering continuous percussive drive which mirrors the rapid melodic passages played on the accordion. *Trikitixa* is widely played today.

When Basque immigrants came to the western U.S., they brought the accordion, and eventually the instrument came to identify Basques both among themselves and among their non-Basque neighbors. The musical experience of the Basques of Buffalo, Wyoming is, in many ways, parallel to that of other small Basque towns in the American West.

In Buffalo—the Basque community has formed a club which has been the sponsor of the local dance troupe—the Big

Horn Basque Dancers. The troupe is made up of children and young people from Basque families. For a few of the dances, the accompaniment is provided by the *Txistu*, but most dances are performed to the music of a single accordion. While the piano accordion, which was fully developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, has largely supplanted the diatonic button accordion in Basque communities of the American West, the Buffalo group continues to use the older diatonic accordion.

The Big Horn Basque Dance group was formed at a time when people feared the loss of an identifiable Basque community. The purpose of the group is community maintenance, so its director and dancers devote great attention to replicating dances as they would be performed in *Euskadi*. In order to achieve authenticity, some directors travel to Europe to see the dances performed. They also consult older dancers, view videotapes of prominent European and American dance troupes, and even reconstruct dances from oral or written descriptions.

Throughout the American West, Basque dance troupes perform many of the same songs and dances—"Hegi," "Zazpi Jauziak," "Bolant-Dantza," "Axuri Belza," "Banako," "Diana Donostia," "Makil Haundia," "Baztan Dantza," and others. Troupes try to include dances from many, if not all, of the seven Basque provinces. The dances must identify the local Basque community without excluding regions of the original Basque homeland that may not be represented in the American group.

In the past, performances took place at Basque-only community events—at dinners or picnics, in celebration of Catholic holidays, especially the August 15th Feast of the Assumption of Mary, or as part of large family gatherings. In recent times there has been an increasing sense that the dances can and should be performed at non-Basque public events.

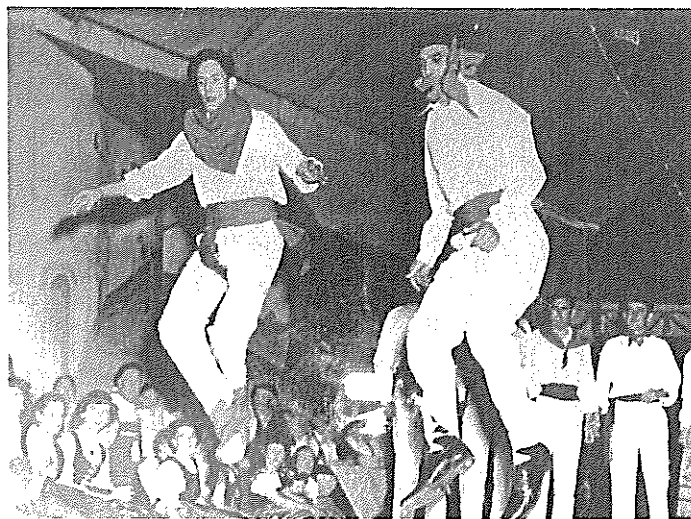
Basque dance can be divided into two parts—performance dancing and social dancing. The local troupe, after formal rehearsal sessions, will present dances to the community. After this performance, audience members will be invited to dance with the troupe one or more widely known dances from the performance repertoire. The last of these dances will be a *fandango*—the most popular social dance among the Basque people throughout the West. The *fandango* acts as a bridge between the purely performance dancing and the social dancing—polkas, waltzes, schottisches—that follows the performance.

Both the performance dances and the social *fandango* are intricate and precise. To the Basque people, these dances are more than motion, color and sound. In *Euskadi* in the American West, music and dance are important markers of ethnic identity.

Perhaps in response to the Spanish experience of having the dances seen as politically dangerous, some American Basques have presented their dance troupes in purely aesthetic terms. There is a sort of cultural schizophrenia in doing so because the dance troupes have usually been formed in order to emphasize



Elko Ariñak dancers performing the traditional Basque dance Arku Dantza at the National Basque Festival in Elko, Nevada, 1994. Photography: Charles Blakeslee



Young dancers perform the Atresku during Boise's Music Week, 1950.

Basque identity. Still, the attempt to make the dances non-threatening to the broader community is understandable in light of Basque history in the United States.

The first Basques in the American West were often despised by some native-born Americans. The Basques were itinerant herders who entered the West at the end of the days of the open range. They were viewed as interlopers and their strange unknown language marked them as more foreign than foreign. Basques had to prove themselves "good Americans."

In the course of this century the image of the Basques has changed dramatically. They have gone from despised newcomer to romantic hero and hard worker. Outsiders frequent Basque restaurants and Basque festivals, taking away a new image of the hearty Basques who live for good food and wine, for sport and for dance. As William A. Douglass has stated, "American society is most tolerant of ethnic differences in the areas of cuisine and innocuous folk arts."

Aware of this and aware too of how recently they were reviled by some segments of American culture, many Basques have sought to present their dance as one such "innocuous folk art." One American dance troupe director has said that when he returned from studying music and dance in *Euskadi*, some members of his community were reluctant to send their children to participate in his performance group. They feared that the director's commitment to the preservation of the regional dances was a mask for *ETA* sympathies. *ETA*—*Euskadi ta Askatasuna, Basque Land and Liberty*—is the militant wing of the Basque separatist movement.

Basque dance is shaped by the history of the Basque people, by their centuries of struggle for independence, and by their experience in isolated rural communities of the American West. In this social and historical context, the dance is more than

artistic expression; it is a social and political statement of independence and unity.

In the Buffalo dance troupe's repertoire, there is one especially evocative dance—"Zazpi Jauziak." This dance is one of the first taught to children and normally only children perform the dance.

"Zazpi Jauziak" means "Seven Jumps"—a reference to the fact that there are seven Basque provinces and, while each is separate from the others with differences in language, history and customs, the seven make up one Basque nation.

The music and dance for "Zazpi Jauziak" are in three sections. The first and second sections each include a few of the basic steps that go into making many Basque dances. Significantly, the third section is simply one bar of music.

After the first playing of sections one and two, the young dancers leap as high as they can into the air while audience members shout out "Bano!" (One!) After the second playing of sections one and two, the one-bar-long third part is played twice. The dancers leap twice and the audience members shout out with the leaps, "Bano! Biga!" (One! Two!) This goes on seven times so that the last time through, the one-bar third part is played seven times, the dancers leap seven times and the audience members call out, "Bano! Biga! Him! Lau! Bos! Sei! Zazpi!" (One! Two! Three! Four! Five! Six! Seven!) This marks the dance as complete.

"Zazpi Jauziak" offers not only musical completeness—the relaxed feel of parts one and two played again and again, followed by the tension of the increasing number of leaps—but also social completeness. Community members are aware of the social and historical meaning of the dance, of the presence, if only symbolically, of Basque unity, and of the hope of maintaining Basque identity into the future. Young dancers and older audience members are brought together and both share in a history that, through dance, remains alive. ■



The Oinkari Dancers from Boise perform the jota, a traditional Basque dance. Photo: Julie Malan

Changing Images

by Richard Etulain, Ph.D.

Professor, Department of History, University of New Mexico

"...most Americans continue to associate Basques with sheepherding, even though increasingly smaller numbers of Euskaldunak are involved in that occupation."

—Richard Etulain

When sizeable groups of Basques began to immigrate to the American West during the mid-to-late nineteenth century, few Americans knew much about the *Euskaldunak*. Recognition of the Basque presence would expand markedly in the next half century, however. By the early twentieth century, journalists, politicians, and government officials recognized Basques as notable participants in the western livestock industry, especially as sheepmen. Unfortunately, some of these reactions were not positive—in fact they were extremely negative. But in the late 1930s and in the postwar decades of the 1940s and 1950s, images became more sympathetic, sometimes excessively romantic. Since the yeasty 1960s, an era in which many Americans discovered the importance of cultural diversity even while rediscovering their own ethnic heritages, Basques have frequently been hailed as rock-ribbed traditionalists, solid citizens of the first order. The launching of Basque ethnic celebrations, the formation of dance groups, the publication of several important books about western Basques, and the establishment of a national Basque organization have done much to communicate the Basque ethnicity to other Americans.

Before Basques appeared in the American West as miners, herders, and livestockmen, they played varied roles in earlier New World history. For example, we now know that the *Euskaldunak* were among the first whalers to cross the northern Atlantic, and they also worked as cod fishermen. If New World residents failed to note Basque presence in these occupations, their participation in the Spanish overseas empire as explorers, sailors, administrators and priests became increasingly clear. The famed cleric Bishop Juan de Zumarraga, New Mexican explorer and founder Juan de Onate, and Spanish official Juan Bautista de Anza were among the most noted Basques in the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Later, political leaders Jose Maria de Echeandia and Manuel Micheltoarena and missionary and religious administrator Fermin Francisco de Lasuen occupied important leadership positions in Spanish and Mexican California, even though they were rarely recognized as Basques.

The first Basques to be widely recognized ethnically were participants in the gold rushes and livestock industry of the second half of the nineteenth century. Soon after news of the California gold strikes spread to South America, thousands of Basques streamed into the Far West from the south. In addition to working as miners, these newcomers later became herders and livestockmen, thereby helping to fill the demand for fresh meat among miners and other settlers flooding into the West. By the 1870s, the Altube brothers, Pedro and Bernardo, and French Basques Jean and Grace Garat had invaded the Great

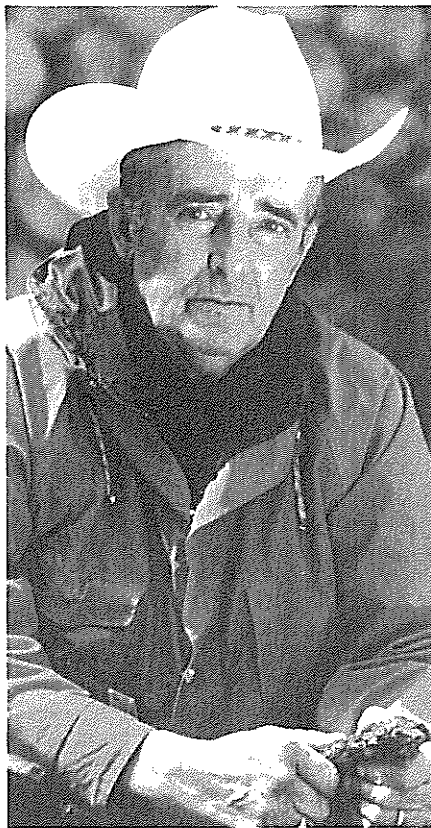


John B. Garat Sr. on his favorite mount at age 79. As a twelve year old, he rode north to Nevada with his father, Juan Garat, to found the YP Ranch. The Northeastern Nevada Museum, Elko, Nevada.

Basin, founding sprawling ranches in Nevada. Gradually, the names and reputations of these and other successful *Euskaldunak* stuck in the memories of American westerners, especially among their competitors. Scattered references to "those Basques," "those Frenchmen from the Pyrenees," and "those Vizcainos" began to appear in newspapers, memoirs and government reports.

Not all these mentions were positive; in fact, some were decidedly negative. For instance, in the midst of the Spanish-American War, the Carson City (Nevada) *Morning Appeal* referred to Basques passing through the area as "these copper-colored bull fighters" "full of war talk." Even more vitriolic was Nevada Senator Key Pittman's attack on Basque sheepmen as "lacking in intelligence, independence, and anything else." "They are nothing but sheepherders," he continued. Adding to these negative stereotypes was a report in the Caldwell (Idaho) *Tribune* of July 1, 1909. "The sheepmen of Owyhee County are sorely beset by Biscayans," the editor reported; "Bascos, as they are commonly called," and their "scale of living . . . [and] . . .

Robert Laxalt, Carson City, Nevada, 1994. With the publication of *Sweet Promised Land* in 1957, Robert Laxalt emerged as the literary spokesman for the region's Basques. For 40 years he has continued to bring national and international attention to the Basque experience in America. Photography: John Ries, Reno, Nevada



methods of doing business . . . are on a par with those of the Chinaman." These Basques "are filthy, treacherous and meddling . . . They are clannish and undesirable . . . [and] will make life impossible for the white man." Then the journalist, after having harpooned what he considered repugnant intruders, had to admit that the Basques worked "hard and [had] their money."

Although these negative images spiced newspaper and government reports well into the 1930s, other more positive images surfaced alongside these demeaning portraits. In several western cities and towns such as San Francisco, Reno, Elko, and Buffalo, Wyoming, Basques were saluted as hardworking, ambitious newcomers. Especially was this the case in Boise, where the Basques established an enclave that may have made up nearly 5 percent of the population. Known first as herders, livestockmen, miners, and construction workers, they soon established several boardinghouses and, eventually, restaurants known for their enormous, inexpensive meals. The Boise Basques also gained reputations as devout Catholics and sturdy athletes.

Three events in the next generation from the 1930s to the

1960s helped transform images of the Basques in the American West. When the Spanish Republicans, whom the Basques supported (as did many American volunteers, including Ernest Hemingway), lost the Spanish Civil War, hundreds of Spanish Basque men were more than willing to abandon their home country for jobs in the New World, helping to swell the numbers of herders in the American West. Also the passage of the Taylor Grazing Act in 1934 essentially ended the careers of dozens of Basque "tramp sheepmen" who before that legislation tried to survive on government-owned grazing lands in states such as Nevada, Idaho, and California. Even though the act squeezed out most of these itinerant livestockmen, it also helped to end negative images of Basques as selfish, greedy sheepmen. Most of these unsavory representations had disappeared by the end of World War II.

Important too in shaping a new, more positive image of Basques was Robert Laxalt's novelized biography of his Basque father, *Sweet Promised Land* (1957). A pleasant, smoothly written narrative of Dominique Laxalt, the archetypal sheepherder working his lonely trade in the meadows and mountainsides of Nevada, this popular book appealed to thousands of Basques as the story of the Basque herder, even as it informed larger numbers of non-Basques about the courage, ambitions, and optimistic outlook of these enigmatic peoples.

Not surprisingly, the dramatic events of World War II, the Cold War, and the 1960s triggered a new set of experiences and image-changes for the *Euskaldunak*. Special needs among livestockmen brought in a new generation of immigrant herders through the 1950s, even as earlier Basques moved to nearby towns and cities. As they clustered together in urban areas throughout Idaho, Nevada, and California and in smaller communities in Oregon, Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, the Basques frequently gathered to celebrate through dances, picnics, and athletic competitions. At first these events were limited to Basques, but in 1959 the first national Basque festival, celebrated in Sparks, Nevada, began a tradition of bringing together *Euskaldunak* and non-Basques at annual Basque festivals and gatherings.

Concurrently, Basques were making their way into political arenas. In Oregon, Anthony Yturri played a major role in state politics, while Pete Cenarrusa served continuously as Secretary of State in Idaho for nearly 30 years. Meanwhile, after a successful stint as Nevada's governor, Paul Laxalt was elected a U.S. Senator. A close friend of Ronald Reagan, Laxalt moved in high Republican circles and was even rumored to be a possible vice-presidential or presidential candidate. Although few Americans outside the West seemed to understand his Basque heritage, westerners—and Basques especially—recognized his conservative politics and traditionalism as well-known Basque hallmarks.

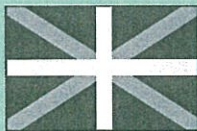
New organizations also helped to spawn revised images of the Basques. Sensing a need to coordinate their efforts, Basque clubs joined forces to launch the North American Basque Organizations (NABO), which helps sponsor region-wide Basque

celebrations, encourages ethnic projects, and coordinates and underwrites other endeavors. The Basque Studies Program at the University of Nevada, Reno, housing the world's best Basque library, also has done much to spawn a new generation of researchers, American and European, who in turn have produced a rich crop of scholarly and popular books. The Reno center likewise administrates a well-organized program of overseas studies in the Basque Country, as well as a full round of student and faculty exchanges with Old World Basques. The center and the University of Nevada Press also jointly sponsor a Basque Book Series numbering more than 20 volumes, including Robert Laxalt's Basque Family Trilogy, several books by the country's leading scholar of the Basques, William A. Douglass, and popular Basque cookbooks, photographic books on Basque shepherders, and Basque dictionaries and grammars. These organizations and programs have not only given numerous Basques a wider window on the world, but additionally have provided non-Basques fuller, more dependable portraits of the *Euskaldunak* than were available in romantic Sunday newspaper supplements.

Obviously, then, images of the Basques have shifted dramatically over the centuries, and especially since significant numbers of Basques began arriving slightly more than a century ago. At this point one needs to ask what are the contemporary images of Basques in the American West, how are they presently seen from without and within? Knowing that these images are continually in transition, one can still say that most Americans continue to associate Basques with shepherding, even though increasingly smaller numbers of *Euskaldunak* are involved in that occupation. Revealingly, Basques themselves

erected a gigantic, modernistic sculpture (just outside Reno) of a shepherd when they chose to memorialize their presence in the American West. In addition, Basque festivals and Basque restaurants, still operational in California, Nevada, and Idaho, continue to provide tourists and travelers with images of colorful, robust, and patriotic *Euskaldunak*. And an expanding group of scholars has produced well-researched essays and books examining the Basque presence in the U.S. and elsewhere, demonstrating that Basques played other, more complex roles in addition to their work as herders.

Present-day images of Basques, then, marry the old and new. Without abandoning earlier pictures of Basques as herders and livestockmen, increasing numbers of Basques and onlookers alike now realize that Basques also have been—and still are—recognizable participants in the West's agriculture, politics, and ethnic makeup. Interpreters will continue to portray Basques as herders even as they begin to view them as important Westerners taking part in a variety of other jobs and activities. At the same time, Basques are represented as a separate minority and occupational group as well as traditional, loyal Americans. ■



Ikurrina
The Basque Flag

First flown in the Basque capital of Bilbao in 1894, the Basque flag was the official flag of the short-lived autonomous Basque Republic of 1936 and was the banner of the Basques in the Spanish Civil War. Its white cross symbolizes the cross of Christ, its green cross the sacred oak and Basque culture, and the red field, the province of *Bizkaia*.

Symbols of a People



Lauburu

The *lauburu* is an ancient design found in the Basque country on tombs and over the doors of older *baserri*. In the West, it appears on banners, ribbons, books and other materials representing Basque identity and culture.



Zazpiak Bat
Coat of Arms

Designed in 1897, the Basque Coat of Arms represents the seven Basque provinces: Nafarroa, Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and Araba in Spain, and Lapurdi, Zuberoa and Benafarroa in France. Although divided between two nations, Basques consider themselves as one people. *Zazpiak Bat*, which means "the seven are one," emphasizes this sense of unity.

Beyond Amerikanuak

by William A. Douglass, Ph.D.
Professor and Coordinator of Basque Studies,
University of Nevada-Reno

"Commemoration of a way of life in bronze is most certainly a statement about its passing."

—William A. Douglass

Now that the era of the Basque sheepman is over, what of the Basque-Americans who have inherited the images, though few if any of the realities, of that period? In the 1990 U.S. census nearly 50,000 people, half of whom reside in California, Nevada and Idaho, self-identified as Basques. There are currently more than 20 Basque social clubs in the United States, primarily in communities like Boise, Elko, Reno, San Francisco, Bakersfield, and others. Most sponsor a folk dance group and an annual festival which puts on public display the Old World Basque peasant heritage (folk costume, folk dances, and woodchopping, weight-carrying, weight-lifting competitions) and the New World sheepherding legacy (the western barbecue and social dance, sheephooking competition, sheep dog exhibitions). The festivals emerged as the Basque-American contribution to what has been called the "roots phenomenon," whereby in recent years "hyphenated" Americans have come to celebrate their ethnic heritage.

The other major expression of Basque-American ethnicity was the Basque hotel located in the servicing centers of the open range districts of the American West. Usually, founded by an ex-herder and his wife, the hotels began as boarding houses serving the sheepherder who was in transit to a new job, vacationing in town following a year on the range, or seasonally unemployed during the winter months after fall shipping and before spring lambing. For the herders the hotel was truly home. It was also the prime vehicle for formation of Basque-American families and, by extension, the Basque-American community. For it was in a hotel that a herder was likely to meet an eligible bride recruited by the hotel keeper from the Basque Country to serve as waitress or maid. The few single women in a largely male world seldom remained single for long.

If the majority of herders were sojourners who, after several years of sheepherding, re-



Dancer in front of the Monument to the Basque Sheepherder, Peavine Mountain, near Reno. Titled, bakardade, or "solitude," the monument commemorates a century of Basque herding in thirteen western states. Photography: Joe Gosen

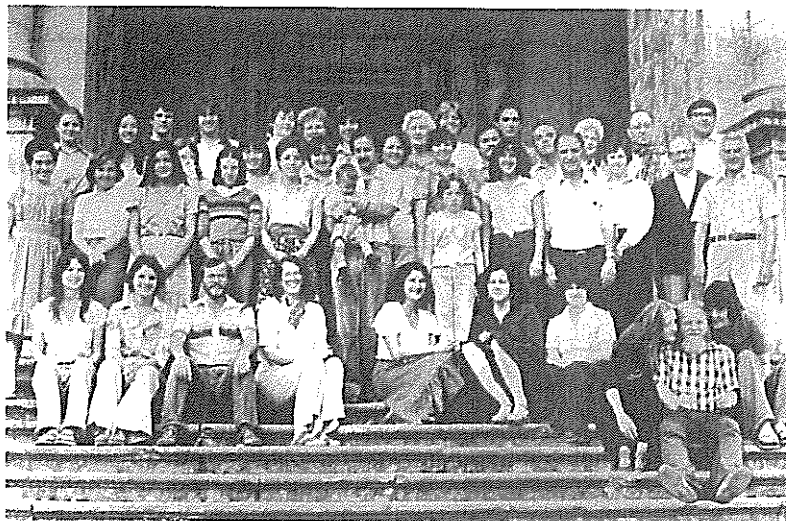
turned to Europe with their savings, there gradually emerged a core of Basque-American families committed to a future in America. They and their descendants provided an additional dimension to the hotel clientele. For Basque-Americans it served as ethnic enclave where one could rub shoulders with Old World Basques, practice one's less-than-polished Basque language skills, celebrate a wedding or baptism, or simply enjoy a Basque meal.

By the 1950s the combination of several factors stimulated ethnic curiosity and associational impulses among Basque-Americans. The first was the glorification of rural life styles in an America increasingly disillusioned with contemporary life in the consumer society. The second was the search for ancestral roots. And the third was a generational distancing of a Basque-American community from both its Old World peasant and New World ranching heritages. In 1957 Robert Laxalt published *Sweet Promised Land*, an account of his father's life as a Basque sheepman in the American West and subsequent return to his natal village in the French Basque country. The bestselling book summed up the family history of most Basque-Americans and communicated its essence to a wider public. The Basque-Americans had their literary spokesman.

In 1959 the first National Basque Festival, held in Nevada, was attended by several thousand persons. It drew together for the first time Basques from throughout the American West. It provided the stimulus for the creation of Basque clubs in several communities, as well as the festival model which they adopted as their prime activity.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, then, Basque ethnicity evolved from an intimate expression largely confined to the privacy of the Basque-American home and the precincts of the semiprivate Basque boardinghouse to a conscious display of ethnic pride. Basque social clubs proliferated, their dance groups were increasingly requested to put on public performances, and the Basque festival in a dozen communities emerged as a major local, and even regional, attraction. Often, it was the object of considerable media attention.

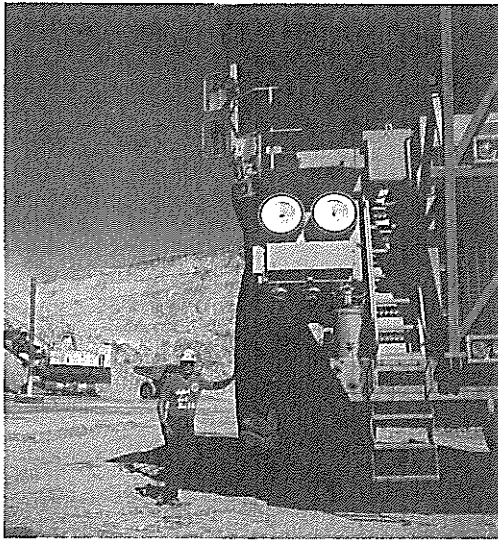
The Basque hotel, with its cuisine served family-style in an exotic ethnic setting, was discovered by non-Basques. This conversion of the former, no-nonsense, working men's boarding houses into tourist attractions was accelerated during the 1970s with the decline of the open range sheep industry and the demise of the Basque herder within it. Several hotels ceased to accept boarders at all, becoming eating establishments exclusively; meanwhile Basque restaurants which had never catered to herders appeared on the scene. Whether a converted hotel or new enterprise, the Basque restaurant has become a monument to studied ethnicity—a place where Old World peasant artifacts and graphic village scenes share wall space with memorabilia from life on the western ranges. Costumed waitresses and bartenders, not necessarily Basques themselves, serve the patrons and are schooled to answer the oft-repeated question, "Who are the Basques?"



One of the first groups of Basque American university students to study in the Basque country.

In 1989 in Reno 2500 persons gathered to dedicate the National Monument to the Basque Shepherd. Its centerpiece is an abstract sculpture by noted Basque sculptor Nestor Basterretxea. It evokes the solitary figure of the herder, lamb on his shoulders, standing tall under an imposing firmament. The dedication ceremony was pregnant with both symbolism and controversy. For Basque-Americans desirous of a traditional, figurative representation of their ancestors' contributions the work was unsatisfactory. Nor were the delegation of dignitaries from the Basque country entirely comfortable with the peasant and sheepherding depiction of Basque essence, since they wished to project the public image of one of Europe's more modern and industrialized regions. For present purposes, however, the important point is that the very conception of the monument itself represents a watershed development for the Basque-American community. Commemoration of a way of life in bronze is most certainly a statement about its passing.

In short, then, Old World peasant origins and a New World sheepherding legacy are increasingly irrelevant to the Basque ethnic identity in the American West. Today's Basque-American is likely two or three generations removed from Europe and unlikely to have been born on a sheep ranch. The union between an Old-World-born ex-herder and the New-World-born daughter of a Basque rancher or hotelkeeper, once quite common, is largely a thing of the past. Today's Basque-American family typically entails a "mixed marriage." Few young Basque-Americans are exposed to the Basque language in their homes. The Basque boardinghouse, once the lynchpin of the Basque-American community, has simply disappeared, or rather evolved into an eating establishment which caters more to the wider American public than to the needs of Basque-



Elias "Choch" Goicoechea with Haulpack truck at Barrick Goldstrike Mine, north of Battle Mountain, northeastern Nevada. As with many contemporary young Basques, Elias' great grandfather came from the Basque country to herd sheep earlier in this century. Photography: Charles Blakeslee

Americans. The festivals of the individual clubs are also showing signs of fatigue; all of the older ones are experiencing declining attendance. It seems evident, then, that we are truly at the end of an era.

Should this be lamented? Is the race over? The answer to both questions is probably "No." On the one hand, it is likely that the social clubs, the restaurants and the festivals will continue their activities at some level. Irish-Americans celebrate St. Patrick's Day and Celtic New Year—including folk costume, dance and traditional games. The level of enthusiasm of the Sons of Erin continues unabated even though, arguably, most Irish-Americans are increasingly out of touch with the contemporary reality of Ireland.

In the case of some Basque-Americans, as with a small segment of Irish and other hyphenated Americans, there is also a discernible interest in moving beyond the folkloric and celebratory expressions of ethnic heritage. This is manifested in the interest of a minority in many clubs to sponsor Basque language classes for the membership. It is reflected in the decision of the Basque-American student to attend a summer, semester or year-long course held in the Basque Country and organized by a consortium of American universities. The travel of young Basque-Americans to Europe is increasingly complemented by that of European Basque students who come to the United States to study. Indeed, to the extent that Basque-Americans marry Old-World Basques it is becoming increas-

ingly common for the union to be between university students who met while one was studying in the other's country.

Finally, there are now institutional commitments to the sustenance of Basque culture in the United States which were entirely lacking when the *Amerikannak* were founding their first social clubs and festivals. Since the 1970s North American Basque Organizations, Inc. (NABO) has provided an umbrella organization for the Basque social clubs in the United States. NABO regularly sponsors contacts between Basque-Americans and the Basque Country, while forging regional ties between the Basque organizations of the United States. Three American universities have made commitments to Basque culture. Boise State University teaches the language and cosponsors the study abroad courses in the Basque Country. The University of California Santa Barbara has a Basque Studies chair. And the University of Nevada-Reno has a Basque Studies Program along with being the prime organizer of the study abroad initiatives in Europe. For its part, *Euskojaularitza*, or the government of the Basque Autonomous Community in Spain, has since 1980 pursued a policy of fomenting close ties with the Basque emigrant diaspora worldwide, including communities in South America and Australia. It regularly provides funding to NABO and to the American university initiatives.

If dedication of the National Monument to the Basque Sheepherder marked the end of one era for Basque-Americans, then the decision to hold *Jaialdi* in Boise in 1990 may have initiated another. *Jaialdi*, or "Festive Event," incorporated elements of the standard Basque festival (folk dance, costume, Basque food), yet transcended it. Its participants included a charter flight of European Basques as well as many Basque students studying throughout the United States. The Basque government sent several of the best performing artists to the event, where they alternated with Basque folk dance groups from throughout the American West. The festivities included a contemporary Basque film festival, a Basque dance performance and a Basque lecture series underwritten by the Idaho Humanities Council. Approximately 30,000 persons, Basque and non-Basque, attended the *Jaialdi*. Each one had the opportunity to reinterpret the Basque experience against an historical backdrop of political separatism, of economic uncertainty and change, of linguistic differentiation, of cultural assimilation, and an immense array of other social factors that run together to form the heritage of any group. It is out of the elements of a *Jaialdi* that a new Basque-American identity for the 21st-century is likely to emerge—if it is to emerge at all. ■

A Basque Bookshelf

One of the aims of the *Amerikanuak!* project is to stimulate increased study of the Basques by the general public. To achieve this end, it is distributing a collection of excellent books on the Basque experience to 20 participating libraries in four states. Most of the books included in this "Basque Bookshelf" collection can also be purchased through the University of Nevada Press, Dept. FW93, MS 166, Reno, NV 89557-0076 (702) 784-6573.

Amerikanuak: Basques in the New World

by William A. Douglass and Jon Bilbao
University of Nevada Press

In the melting pot of peoples that make up the New World, probably less is known about the Basques than any other ethnic group.

It may come as a surprise to laymen and even some historians to learn that the Basques have been present in the New World for at least five centuries. The threads of this story have been unraveled by anthropologist William A. Douglass and historian Jon Bilbao.

Seafaring Basques led the way in their pursuit of whales across uncharted oceans, certainly seeing Newfoundland and Canada in the early 1500s and perhaps long before. Christopher Columbus's first expedition was dependent upon Basque ships and sailors. The exploits of Basque conquistadors, missionaries, and colonists formed a dramatic part of the history of South America, Mexico, and Spanish California. Basque shepherders were the backbone of the now nearly-vanished range sheep empires of the American West.

As background to understanding the Basque character and their homeland in the Pyrenean mountains and seacoasts between France and Spain, authors Douglass and Bilbao trace the Basques from their mysterious origins in prehistory to the age of exploration.

Basque Nationalism

by Stanley G. Payne
University of Nevada Press

The confrontation between the Franco regime and Basque nationalists in recent years has produced a series of spectacular political assassinations, trials, and reprisals.

In this work, internationally noted historian Stanley G. Payne presents a vivid account of a century of ferment to establish an independent Basque country.

In his probing into the causes and consequences of Basque nationalism from its origins until the present, he has provided a fascinating and well-written account of a viable opposition movement capable of challenging the unity of the Spanish state.

At the same time, Professor Payne explores the many nuances, contradictory trends, and diverse opinions within the ranks of the Basque nationalists themselves. What emerges is the portrait of a movement that is fragmented into many groups of differing political ideologies, goals, and tactics.

Basque Nationalism is a work of major importance for any student of Iberian history. In a broader sense, it is also critical to an understanding of how ethnic enclaves relate to central authority within modern nation-states.

A Book of the Basques

by Rodney Gallop
University of Nevada Press

Rodney Gallop's classic work on the Basques was first published in England in 1930. It is a comprehensive study in English of the mysterious race that inhabits the Pyrenees mountains and seacoasts between France and Spain.

This book probes into the unsolved origins of the Basques, their long struggle to preserve racial identity in the face of invasions, and, most importantly, the strength of character that has enabled the Basques to survive. Their complex language, folklore, ancient dances and sports, art, and architecture are also treated with insight.

Gallop's sound scholarship has yielded a book that is required reading for the serious student of ethnic cultures. His lucid literary style also makes this a vivid book.

Beltran: Basque Sheepman of the American West

by Beltran Paris
as told to William A. Douglass
University of Nevada Press

Born and raised on a small farm in the Basque region of France, Beltran Paris emigrated to the American West in 1912 at the age of 23. Unable to speak a word of English, Paris made the long journey to join his cousins in Wyoming. Moving on to Nevada, Paris worked as a shepherd and then a camp tender in the deserts and mountains near Elko. He learned quickly and eventually purchased a ranch of his own, married, and started a family.

By the end of his life Paris was the owner of an extensive ranching operation and several thousand acres of land. However, the road to success was not easy. Paris barely survived the farm crash of 1921 and the rigors of the depression and drought years, and later he lost considerable livestock in the disastrous blizzards of 1948-49.

In his own words, Beltran Paris tells a story that is characteristic of the lives of many Basque immigrants who endured hardships but had rewarding experiences as well.

Basque Shepherders of the American West *Photographs by Richard Lane*

Text by William A. Douglass
University of Nevada Press

For more than a century, Basque shepherders have been an integral part of the development of the American West. Leading a near solitary and nomadic existence in the region's vast deserts and mountains, the Basque herder was both pioneer and backbone of a frail human presence in an otherwise undisturbed natural setting. The sheep camp was superbly adapted to living conditions on the open range, affording the herder comfort and shelter from the elements, yet streamlined to permit easy portability from site to site.

While Basque shepherders were once ubiquitous on the open range of the thirteen western states, today they number only one hundred to two hundred individuals.

Each aspect of the shepherd's work is surveyed in this study, including lambing, trailing, shearing, docking, shipping, and winter and summer herding. The shepherd's personal life is also explored, from the lonely sheep camps to the Basque boardinghouse to the colorful festivals held in the West during the summer. The photographs are drawn from a variety of geographical areas and are representative of shepherders throughout the American West.

Sweet Promised Land

by Robert Laxalt
The University of Nevada Press

In this warm and moving story, Robert Laxalt paints an affectionate portrait of his immigrant father. Dominique Laxalt, a Basque-American shepherd, is persuaded by his family to return home for a long-planned visit after living nearly half a century on the ranges of the American West. Accompanied by his son Robert, Dominique travels to his native Basque country in the French Pyrenees. His return to the village and mountain trails of his youth evokes ambiguous feelings as he describes to his relatives the life of hardship he has endured in the United States. The nostalgic trip to his native land ends poignantly as the elder Laxalt realizes that America has become his true home.

Told with compelling sensitivity, this story portrays a family whose members share a strength of character drawn from their peasant ancestors yet remain separated by diverse cultures on different continents.

The Basques: The Franco Years and Beyond

by Robert G. Clark
University of Nevada Press

Robert Clark provides the first English-language treatment of Basque nationalism during the post-Franco era. The work complements earlier work of Stanley Payne, *Basque Nationalism*, in two ways. Whereas Payne employs a Madrid-centric perspective in order to analyze Basque nationalism as a regional challenge to central authority, Clark's view is Basque-centric and depicts the Spanish state as the abrogator of the rights of unique people and culture. Secondly, Payne's work essentially terminates with the Spanish Civil War whereas the bulk of Clark's work deals with the Franco period and its aftermath. Clark bases his analysis upon published sources and interviews with Basque nationalists of various persuasions. Clark also lends a personal touch to his work, since his father-in-law, Manuel Irujo, was the last Minister of Justice in the Spanish Republican government and a member of the Basque government-in-exile.

A Time We Knew

Images of Yesterday in the Basque Homeland

Photographs by William Albert Allard
Text by Robert Laxalt
University of Nevada Press

In the late 1960s a profound change was taking place in the rural Basque culture of the Pyrenees. A way of life that had remained almost static for generations was coming to an end. The days of wooden shoes and oxen and hand-hewn yokes were numbered. The coming of the tractor embodied more than the appearance of a complex and impersonal machine, it was a symbol of progress and violent change in the lives and attitudes of peasant farmers.

Photographer William Albert Allard and writer Robert Laxalt were there to capture the change in image and prose. In *A Time We Knew*, Allard's striking images and Laxalt's lyrical prose capture forever the way it once was in the homeland of the Basques: village market days filled with animals and farm folk, handball and jai alai, courtings and song; the sound of tiny bells as the valley flocks wend their way in spring to grassy slopes above the timberline; the vanishing bard and the presence of song at the table, in the bistros, and on the mountain; cobblestone streets and country lanes and old farmhouses; mountain people for whom "the little people" are reality and not superstition.



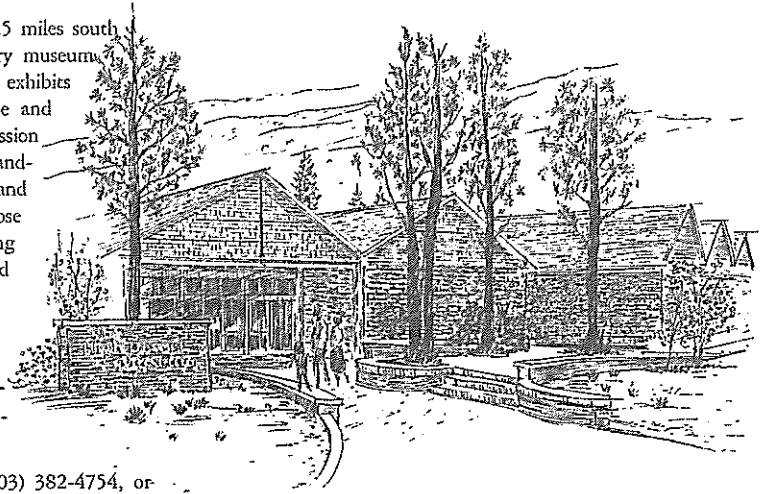
Shepherd's wagon in an aspen grove on The High Desert Museum grounds. The High Desert Museum, Bend, Oregon.

The High Desert Museum

The High Desert Museum, located 3.5 miles south of Bend, Oregon, is a living, participatory museum with a wide variety of indoor and outdoor exhibits and presentations on nature, art, science and history of the Intermountain West. Its mission is to broaden the knowledge and understanding of the natural and cultural history and resources of the High Desert for the purpose of promoting thoughtful decision-making that will sustain the region's natural and cultural heritage.

In December 1994, the Museum announced a three-year campaign to build a Native American wing, a year-round birds of prey center and four other components needed to carry out its mission.

For more information, please call (503) 382-4754, or write The High Desert Museum, 59800 South Highway 97, Bend, Oregon 97702.



The Idaho Humanities Foundation

The Idaho Humanities Foundation, located in Boise, Idaho, is a non-profit (501(c)(3)) organization established in 1990 for the purpose of designing, developing and managing educational programs in a variety of liberal arts disciplines throughout the Intermountain West. Supported primarily by private funds, it concentrates on direct service to the general public and selected academic constituents.

The Foundation encourages programming partnerships with other educational and cultural organizations. It does not make grants. For further information, write The Idaho Humanities Foundation, 111 Broadway, STE 133-165, Boise, Idaho 83702-7200.



