



## **Episode 809, Story 2: Modoc Basket**

Wes Cowan: What tales does this basket tell of the heroism of an American-Indian woman? The lava beds, northern California, 1873. Modoc Indian woman and interpreter, Toby Riddle, rides from the U.S. Army camp into the armed stronghold of Modoc Chief Captain Jack. A small band of Modoc warriors are in an armed standoff with 650 U.S. Army soldiers. Toby risks her life to bring Jack a message he doesn't want to hear...To save your people, you must surrender. Now a woman from Alto, New Mexico, believes she has a basket that may hold a clue about the character and life of Modoc heroine Toby Riddle.

Cherie Cloudt: Toby Riddle was an amazing woman. And I wonder if this basket can be part of her story.

Wes: As an appraiser and auctioneer, I have a special interest in American-Indian items. Cherie Cloudt is an anthropologist who studies early homesteading on the New Mexico frontier.

Wes: Great little basket. What do you know about it?

Cherie: I think it's Modoc.

Wes: And what makes you think it's Modoc?

Cherie: Well, if you'll turn the basket around...you will see a name.

Wes: T-o-b-y...who's Toby?

Cherie: I think it's Toby Riddle. She was a Modoc...woman. And she was a heroine of the Modoc War.

Wes: Cherie knows that the 1872-1873 Modoc War took place in Northern California and Southern Oregon.



Cherie: The government was trying to move the Modocs to a reservation. And, Toby was actually a mediator and the interpreter between the Modocs and the U.S. Government.

Wes: Where did you get this basket?

Cherie: Well, it came from an old family friend in Arizona.

Wes: Cherie explains that her friend believed that Toby Riddle had given the basket to another family member back in the early 1900s. What do you think I can help you with?

Cherie: Well, I'd like to know if it's actually a Modoc basket. And if Toby Riddle actually made this basket.

Wes: The Modoc were one of a number of tribes whose land straddled what is now the Oregon/California border. Well, Cherie thinks it's Modoc. I would have to agree with her that it's Modoc or Klamath. It's certainly from Northern California or Southern Oregon, just judging by the design motifs here. This is all done by hand here. And it looks aged enough to be from the early 1900s, but I can't be certain. What's really unusual about this basket is the name Toby. Very seldom do you see any baskets from this part of the world with a name stitched into the basket itself. I don't know a great deal about the Modoc Wars, and I certainly can't tell if this basket was made by Toby Riddle. The Shaw Historical Library at the Oregon Institute of Technology is located on traditional Modoc land in Klamath Falls, and has a large collection on the Modoc and the war. Toby Riddle was born about 1850, as a member of the Modoc tribe. And she was an eyewitness to this wave of white immigrants who came into Northern California. Settlers, gold miners, farmers, ranchers, soldiers, all came in to this area that already had people living here. The Modoc, the Klamath, the Hoopa, the Urack. It was during this period of incredible upheaval that Toby met Frank Riddle. Riddle was a Kentuckian who had come west to seek his fortune in the gold rush. He soon became Toby's husband. And they have to straddle two culturally different worlds – white and Modoc. As European immigrants like Frank Riddle settled on Modoc land, the native people responded by demanding rent, and occasionally rustling cattle. The real flashpoint though, occurred when the U.S. Government told the Modocs, "Hey look, we're hearing all these bad things about you from the settlers. And you have to give up your traditional homeland, and go live with the Klamath." Well...the Klamath were their traditional enemies. The guerilla fighting



between bands of Modoc, Klamath, and U.S. soldiers in 1873 was fierce. Many of these engravings were done directly from photographs that were taken, on the spot, by Edward Muybridge and Louis Heller. And they show the absolute captivation that America had with the Modoc War. This book is by Alfred Meecham, a government bureaucrat who was also an eyewitness to the fighting. He knew Riddle very well. In fact, Toby Riddle saved his life during the Modoc War, and, this is what he had to say about her: "This book is written with the avowed purpose of doing honor to the heroic Toby Riddle," or Wi-Ne-Ma as he's calling her, "who at the peril of her life, sought to save the ill fated peace commission to the Modoc Indians in 1873. The woman to whom the writer is indebted, under God, for saving his life.

Wes: I want to learn exactly how Toby saved Meacham's life. But first, is this even a Modoc basket? I'm in Portland, Oregon to see my old friend Natalie Linn. She's an expert on Native American baskets, and often consults with museums and private collectors. Now, the owner of this basket thinks that it's Modoc. What do you think?

Natalie Linn: Well, I think it is definitely a Modoc basket. And we know that because of the materials that were used.

Wes: Natalie explains the traditional material for Modoc basketry was tule, a type of reed that grows along the rivers and marshes of Northern California. Now...what do you think of the age of that basket?

Natalie: I think 1890's to 1910, maybe at the latest. And by the way, a few years makes a lot of difference. There's a certain patina that is added. The reeds here have had a chance to fade. And we don't get as vibrant a basket.

Wes: Ok. Let me just show you one more thing that I think is pretty interesting about this. There's the name woven into it, Toby. Supposedly, that name refers to Toby Riddle. The heroine of the 1872 Modoc War. Have you heard of Toby Riddle before?

Natalie: Oh, yes, she was a very historic woman. Is there any documentation that says that Toby wove this basket?



Wes: No. It's only word of mouth. Only oral tradition.

Natalie: I see. Well, it is very rare to have the name of a weaver on the basket. If they were very proud of their work, oftentimes they would use a maker's mark. And a maker's mark was usually a couple of stitches that do not belong to the original design. It was never a signature per se.

Wes: Natalie says this is because traditionally the tribe didn't have a written language. What were these baskets used for?

Natalie: The baskets were used for cooking. For gathering. For storing. Even though basketry was originally made for utility, everything was embellished. And it's funny, because there is no name for art, in any Native American language. But baskets became the vanity point for certain wonderful weavers that incorporate, what we know as art, into their production.

Wes: What do you think the likelihood is that Toby actually made this basket?

Natalie: You know, Wes, I cannot say for sure.

Wes: I want to find out exactly how Toby became a hero during the Modoc war. But first, native weaver Nadra Gallagher has offered to show me how baskets were traditionally made.

Nadra: I learned how to gather this stuff from my grandma. We were young kids when we were doing it. And she would just sit in the boat. And we'd shove her through the tules and she'd say, I want that one, or whatever.

Wes: The tule reeds bound the entire Modoc world. The fibrous plant was used for baskets, hats, arrow shafts, even lightweight canoes.

Nadra: We would pull the whole tule up. And then this is what she would get.

Wes: So how do you prepare the tule to weave?



Nadra: This would be soaked, so you could just go right up it, and it would just crack it right open. And then you would put that on your leg, and you're going to keep twisting it. Hold it and roll it all the way to the end. So it would end up being like this. This is my basket that I started. It comes under. Up. Intertwining it over the top of that.

Wes: Oh, I see, okay.

Nadra: Okay. But that's how it works.

Wes: Nadra doesn't know if Toby Riddle made our basket. She says basket weaving was learned by almost all native women, including her grandmother.

Nadra: She did baskets, and she did people, boats, little fish, coffee cup, and boots and hats. That was how we lived.

Wes: I'm in Northern California to see author Peter Cozzens, who's written about the Modoc War. We meet at the lava beds, a place of historic importance to the Modoc. My investigation involves this basket. I tell Peter that Cherie thinks that Toby Riddle may have made it. And as you can see, it has woven into the side of the basket...Toby. So, what do you think?

Peter Cozzens: Well, given its age it's very possible that this basket...the name here could refer to Toby Riddle. She became famous for what happened here and what she did here.

Wes: Peter explains how in the winter of 1872 the U.S. Army had tried to force a band of Modoc off their ancestral land and onto a reservation. Many refused. Led by their chief, Captain Jack, they retreated to these lava beds. Looking around at this tortured terrain, I immediately know why they called it Captain Jack's stronghold.

Peter: It's an incredible natural fortress.

Wes: I ask Peter to tell me about the battle which made Toby famous.



Peter: There are 57 Modoc warriors fighting in through here. They live in caves in the area here of the stronghold, with their children and their wives and their elderly. About 160 Modocs in all. There are 650 soldiers ready to attack. Army to the west. Army to the east.

Wes: So, the Modocs are...they're basically stuck here.

Peter: Basically, yes.

Wes: Well, what does Toby Riddle have to do with all of this? Peter explains how, in February, 1873, Army General Edward Canby proposes peace negotiations with Captain Jack. Toby goes to the stronghold on the Army's behalf, but Jack tells her he cannot surrender.

Peter: So then, Toby leaves the stronghold. And a warrior steps out from behind the rocks and asks her to warn Canby that if the commissioners meet with Jack again, that Jack and his warriors will kill them.

Wes: So Toby Riddle leaves here, knowing that if the meeting takes place, a disaster awaits.

Peter: She begs the commissioners not to go, but Canby can't conceive that the Modocs would be so foolish as to attack the commissioners with so many soldiers around.

Wes: The meeting takes place on this open ground

Peter: They met here on Good Friday. Captain Jack was here with seven of his warriors.

Wes: Joining General Canby was Alfred B. Meacham, who had served as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Oregon, and two other peace commissioners.

Peter: Now they talked and they talked, but Canby could not relent and give the Modocs even the little piece of land they wanted. So Jack gets up, turns around, pulls out his pistol, points it at Canby and pulls the trigger. The pistol misfires. And while Canby stands there in shock, Jack cocks and fires again, and shoots Canby in the face.



Wes: The other warriors start shooting. One commissioner falls dead. Toby tries to protect Meacham, but he's shot several times.

Peter: One of the warriors bends down and tries to scalp Meacham. Toby grabs his arm, but he shoves her away. Then she cries, "The soldiers are coming! The soldiers are coming." Well, no soldiers are...but the Modocs don't wait around to find out. And they immediately run toward the stronghold.

Wes: Peter says that Meacham is badly wounded, but, because of Toby, alive.

Peter: Captain Jack's band slipped out of the stronghold, to the south, into the lava beds. And over the next few weeks, the army tracked down Jack and his band. Captain Jack, and his lieutenants, were tried and convicted of war crimes and hanged.

Wes: But, Peter says, Toby emerged from the Modoc wars as a hero. She went on a lecture tour with Alfred Meacham. Was the basket woven in honor of Toby, or made by Toby herself, as Cherie suspects? Have you heard of any other examples of baskets, or anything with her name being associated with it.

Peter: No, I haven't.

Wes: I'm a little bit stumped at this point.

Peter: Toby had several descendents. And I understand that some of them still live in this area. So, that's where I'd go.

Wes: My office has put me in touch with Debra Herrera, Toby Riddle's great-great-granddaughter. She never met Toby, but is the Riddle family genealogist, and consults with various museums about Modoc history. I know her as Toby Riddle. What was her Modoc name?

Debra Herrera: Her Modoc name was Nanooktowa.

Wes: And what did that mean?



Debra: It meant Strange Child.

Wes: Why strange child?

Debra: She was born with red hair. She did a lot of things that most women her age didn't do, let alone boys. Like she would go on the hunting parties, and go gather horses in other people's camps. Another one, a bear was going to attack her husband, and she came to the rescue and made her skirt rustle like a blanket, or something, lifting it up and shoed the bear away from attacking her husband.

Wes: So she did things that normally, in traditional Modoc society, women just didn't do.

Debra: Right.

Wes: So, after the war was over?

Debra: She traveled back East. And she was just trying to educate the people back East to why the war took place...And probably how it could have been prevented. But, she pretty much lived here in Klamath County.

Wes: Then I show Debra what I'm investigating. Have you seen any other baskets with the name Toby woven into the basket?

Debra: Well, I have something I'd like to show you, I think you'd like to see.

Wes: Now that I've got the answer, it's time to get back to Cherie. You know, I really didn't know a lot about the Modoc War. So this gave me the chance to really dig into this. And I think, that I'm able to answer all of your questions.

Cherie: Okay.

Wes: I visited a basketry expert, who has seen hundreds, thousands of American Indian baskets.



Cherie: Okay.

Wes: And, she was able to identify this basket conclusively as a Modoc basket. Then I tell Cherie that I found Toby's great-great-granddaughter.

Cherie: Oh, wow.

Wes: When I showed her this basket though, her eyes lit up and she said, "I've got something to show you." Oh...wow! So traditionally, your family has understood that Toby made that basket?

Debra: Right.

Wes: When we compare the names, the lettering is almost identical. Wow!

Cherie: Oh, wow!

Wes: But there's more.

Cherie: Okay.

Wes: She turned it around the other side.

Cherie: Oh, my gosh, a date. 1916. Four years before she died.

Wes: I tell Cherie that while we can't say for sure that her basket was made by Toby, the provenance and circumstances certainly make it a strong possibility.

Cherie: I'm honored, because, she was such an unconventional person, a woman, to do what she did, in that time period. I'm glad that you found another basket with her name on it, because I had always thought that this was the only one. And it's great that the family has it.



Wes: After the war, the lives of the Modoc changed dramatically. 155 Modoc members of Captain Jack's band were taken prisoner and relocated to the Quapaw reservation in Oklahoma territory, where their decedents still live today. The Modoc who remained in the West were moved on to the Klamath reservation, where the different tribes joined together to create a successful ranching and timber economy.