

60. The Hang-e or Ceremonial House of the Northern Miwok of
Hachana Village near Railroad Flat, Calaveras County, California

C. Hart Merriam

(The following description of a ceremonial house was written from a half-dozen sheets of carefully made, but unorganized notes made by C. Hart Merriam on October 9 and 10, 1906. Ed.)

The house is round and stands on top of a low knoll. The main door faces nearly northeast. I believe this orientation was due to an error, since customarily the door faces north, and several Indians with whom I spoke about it thought in fact that the door did face due north. The second door is at the opposite side of the structure (facing southwest) and is closed during ceremonies. The exterior walls form a 12-sided polygon about 40 feet in diameter.

The vertical walls consist of 12 upright posts, spaced equally around the perimeter, these vertical posts being connected by two horizontal rows of peeled poles, the lowest circuit measuring 15 inches above the floor, the upper row being 68 inches above the floor and running flush with the tops of the vertical posts. The horizontal poles lie in notches cut into the uprights. The vertical exterior sheathing is nailed to the horizontal poles.

Arranged in a square in the center are 4 tall centerposts with 4 large, smooth, peeled horizontal beams laid from the top of one to the other to form a square. Resting on the corners of this square are the ends of 4 curved or bowed poles upon which the mid-point of the radiating roof rafters rest. The curve is supported by 2 short blocks set under each of the 4 bowed beams. The fireplace is in the center of the floor equidistant from the 4 centerposts.

The roof rafters number 24, half being long and half short [short rafters not shown in Fig. 7a]. The long rafters rest on the upright wall posts. Between each two long rafters are shorter ones which rest upon the square superstructure raised on top of the 4 centerposts, and on the uppermost horizontal pole which ties the tops of the short side-uprights together. The long rafters are cut so that a circular smokehole about 3 feet in diameter is left at the point where they converge, and they are here lashed to a circular hoop. On the rafters and at right angles to them are nailed 15 courses of sheathing boards upon which are nailed the split roof shakes. The rafters overhang the outer wall about 6 inches.

The floor is level with the outside ground surface (i.e. not sunken) and is thickly covered with fresh green needles of Pinus ponderosa in anticipation of the ceremony shortly to be held.

The footdrum, a rectangular plank 2 feet wide and 7 feet long is placed over a hole 4 feet deep situated between the outer wall and the centerpost square.

The singer, moo-le-peh, stands in front of the plank drum. The drummer, too-mup-peh, beats time by dancing with bare feet on the plank. An old man said that a hollow log makes a better drum, and that there used to be one in the older ceremonial house which stood farther out on the promontory, and whose location is marked by a pit.