

OREGON
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE
LIBRARY

Thesis

on

Basketry

Submitted to the Faculty

of the

O R E G O N A G R I C U L T U R A L C O L L E G E

for the degree of

Bachelor of Science

in

Domestic Science and Art

by

Redacted for privacy

June 1911.

Approved

Redacted for privacy

Department of Domestic Art

Redacted for privacy

Dean School of Domestic Science and Art

Outline.

Introduction-

1. Historical record.
2. Leaders in the art of basket-making.

Discussion-

1. Characteristics of tribes represented in baskets.
2. Basketry of the different nations.
3. Importance of basketry.
4. Women first to develop the art.
5. Relationship existing between basketry and weaving.
6. Problems to consider.
7. Materials used.
8. Coloring of material.

Conclusion-

1. Nations and tribes foremost in the art of basket making.
2. What the art will prove to generations hereafter.

Basketry.

"The Basket Barbaric, I'm come from the
painted Britanni,
But Rome now would choose rather to title
me Roman".

Basket making is a primitive art which has been practiced by man as far back through the ages as history can record. When Moses was found hidden in the bulrushes by Pharaoh's daughter, he was in a basket which his mother had woven. When the Israelites were returning to the promised land they offered unto the Lord the first of all the fruits of the earth in a basket made of gold and silver. Every imaginable material has been used in this simple art and in the crudest ways people have practiced this wonderful art. Useful pieces of machinery have been invented by human beings- machinery making furniture, clothing, and luxuries for our lives but basketry, is the only, the one art which depends entirely upon the skill of man's hand. Today we weave baskets in exactly the same way our ancestors, hundreds of years ago wove their

baskets.

The ancient Britons were remarkably skilled in basket making and our American Indians were and are not excelled in the beautiful baskets they produce. Many marked characteristics are represented in the baskets of different tribes. A life time may have been spent working on one basket in which the important events of the life of the worker are shown. It is wonderful to note the perfection attained by uncivilized man in the art of basket making. These uncivilized ancients have produced baskets that are masterpieces that amaze the people of today. This art has been handed down from generation to generation- never losing its fascination.

It is interesting to study the characters of tribes or nations which are represented in baskets. Hindoo basketry, differs widely from Arabian basketry productions. The substantial heavy baskets made by the Holland Dutch are different in design and construction from the baskets made in Northern Germany or France.

Basket work in Japan represents in many striking ways the character and mode of life in that nation.

Baskets are decorative as well as useful and in many cases are used for practical purposes- such as conveying water from place to place.

Women of the lowest type of civilization have not been slow to search out and develop in their very crude ways, baskets which if not beautiful to behold, were most useful in their lives. The negro women formerly transported as slaves from Africa to tropical America found the palm tree growing in the Western Hemisphere and continued making the type of baskets they had formerly made in their own native country. In savagery woman's textile industry, is shown in two distinct phases, basketry work and weaving. The former art has some stitches of its own, employs more rigid material and the products of its operation are vessels which are made complete in the working. While weaving in a truer sense requires a flat textile usually softer material plain stitches and the products are mats, bags, gar-

ments and the like. At first the distinction between weaving and basketry is not clearly defined in our minds but there is a great difference. Basketry in its coarser sense is winding brush in and out to keep the sun and storms from the wretched inhabitants; making crates and nets to catch fish. There are no savages on earth that do not in some way practice basket making. Even birds are basket makers, for they have to weave their little nests, and some species of fishes weave vines and stems in a protecting mass to shield them from the outer environment. Women, though, truly speaking have been the one true stay in this wonderful art.

There is so much that may be represented in a basket that it becomes difficult to say which should receive the more praise, form, coloring, pattern or the delicacy of manipulation.

Endeavoring to represent birds, clouds, trees, or life like forms in their work, savage basket makers have conventionalized these forms and today they are

copied by lace makers and needle women, who are unaware of following the road of their primitive sisters.

There are a great many equally important problems which confront us at once as we attempt the construction of a basket. Have we a design in mind and in connection with this thought we feel the need of a suitable form for our basket. Being aware of the liability there is to make mistakes in the colors we use- much thought should be devoted to this important problem. How disappointing it would be to discover a mistake in the choice of colors, when it was too late to remedy it. In choosing colors, care must be taken with reference to the quantity of light and dark in the subject. Violent harsh coloring must be avoided for the ornamentation should produce a pleasing impression or artistic refinement without calling attention to detail or the capability of the worker. Few realize that pure tones and plainness give value to ornament in the same way that darkness adds brilliancy to light. When beginning a basket we should have a pattern before

us to refer to as a guide throughout our work. The most common material used by basket makers is the raffia, a palm "Raphia Ruffia" which bears pinnate leaves twenty or thirty feet long, upon a moderate trunk. The cuticle is peeled from both sides of the leaf stalk for uses as a fiber. It is pulled or torn in narrow strips dried in the sun or bunched together ready for shipment. This plant is a native of the south Sea Island and of Madagascar and along the coast of South East Africa. The natives made the raffia into mats, and it is used for textile purposes and in agricultural work as tie bands. Raffia imported into the United States is usually in the natural state.

To give an idea of some of the materials used in weaving, a short list of the following may prove interesting:

- Pine needles.
- Leaves of Cat-tails.
- Corn Husks
- Grass
- Rushes, grown in marshes
- Root, like stems of wire grass.
- Squaw grass, which is used by Western Indians.

Stems of ferns
Fibrous roots
Red and yellow willows used in woven baskets.
Reed

The coloring of material from which baskets are made is an interesting problem. The art of dying was known by the ancients. It is mentioned in the Bible that Jacob gave to his favorite son a coat of many colors and Moses relates how the skins used for the Tabernacle were colored red. The methods of dying yellow, black, and green, were discovered by the Indians and brought from India on the return of Alexander the Great.

No better colors are known than those used by the Northwest Indian tribes and these are few in number. The colors are red, green, black, yellow, brown, cream and occasionally a shade in blue.

The art of making colors was jealously guarded by the people of the primitive ages. Tones produced in these ages were all soft rich tones, taken many times from vegetable products which had not the brilliant tones of some colors produced now. It is de-

lightfully astonishing to know how many beautiful colors may be obtained from blossoms, fruits and many plants.

There are three coloring sources; first, coal tar dyes; second, vegetable and third, animal dyes. Some of the coal tar or aniline colors are in themselves harmless but in the process of manufacturing some poisonous substances such as arsenic or mercury is used. In the case of vegetable colors such ^{as} tumeric logwood, annatto, Brazil wood, beets, and safflower are used. The only animal coloring matter in common use is that of the cochineal insect called carmine red.

Colors which can be made successfully by amateurs from simple recipes are the following: Blue, Yellow, Scarlet, Red, Orange, Brownes, Purple, Green, Black and Olive. Receipes for the colors mentioned:

Blue.

Take eight parts of indigo (paste), three and one-half parts of bran and twelve parts of potash or lye with sufficient water. Keep this solution at about 95 degrees for a week to ferment. If it is slip-

perly it needs more bran and lye. Use the latter, one part saturated solution to nine parts of water. This bath will have a greenish color, not at all like indigo. The material to be dyed is placed in the warm dye and allowed to remain for several hours according to its absorbing capacity, is then hung in the air. If a darker shade is required, repeat the process.

Yellow.

Soak the raffia in alummordant over night. Soak faustic chips over night, in the morning boil ten or fifteen minutes in the same water. Strain. Place the material in the strained solution, letting it remain until the desired shade is obtained. If the chips are boiled too long a dull olive color is obtained. It is for this reason the chips are removed after boiling ten or fifteen minutes.

Scarlet.

Mordant the material with six parts of stannous chloride crystals, to four parts of cream of tartar.

Dye with cochineal which has been boiled and strained, until the desired color is obtained.

Red.

Wash the material and soak in an alum mordant over night. Make a solution with hypernic chips. Boil for ten or fifteen minutes the following morning and strain. Place the material to be dyed in the strained solution, leaving it until the desired shade is obtained.

Orange.

A bright orange is made from annatto. A short time before using, dissolve by boiling it with a solution of carbonate of soda for twenty minutes. Mordant the material with stannous chloride (or ten Crystals) which dissolve in a small quantity of water and dye.

Brown.

The shucks of the butternut are used in dying a beautiful shade of brown. Soak the shucks several days and then boil them for about twenty minutes. Strain, add sufficient water to cover the material. Remove the

material when the desired shade is obtained. No mordant is necessary.

Purple.

Soak the material in alum mordant. Place in an extract of logwood, which is obtained by boiling chips. If a blue purple is desired add a little ammonia, baking soda or baking powder.

Green.

To color green use three parts of yellow and eight parts of blue. Different shades of green may be obtained by changing the proportions above mentioned.

Black.

Soak the raffia in a solution composed of fifty parts of logwood and ten parts of fustic for one half hour. The raffia is then removed and four parts of copperas added. The material is again returned and allowed to remain for fifteen minutes. This gives a good black.

Olive.

To obtain a soft olive, dye first with the brown

sedge, wash drain, and then dye in indigo until the desired shade is obtained. Use an alum mordant. Another olive may be obtained by mixing a pale purple with green.

Between the art of basket making and that of pottery exists a generic relation. Rude specimens of pottery being found in all quarters of the world. Boats of basket work with coverings of hide were used by the ancient Britons and were seen by Herodotus I. Among the Indians of the Mississippi valley along the gulf, all pottery vessels of large size used to be modeled in baskets of willow or splints, which after being burned off, their markings remained. On account of the lightness of baskets, combined with their durability and wonderful strength for so frail looking structure, basket work is preferred to joinery in the manufacture of various commodities, as window-screens, pony carriages, tables, chairs and numerous other necessities as well as luxuries.

In South America the natives weave of rushes,

baskets capable of holding liquids, and those of Tasmania now extinct, used to weave of leaves water tight vessels. The most commonly employed material in basket making is the willow or ozier twig, and the production of this material is an important industry in France, Belgium, Germany, Britain and Holland. The product of Britain and France is the most highly esteemed for firmness, evenness and toughness while that of Germany is reputed inferior to that of France, the Dutch product is in least esteem for it is soft and pithy. Also besides ozier twigs, a great variety of other materials are employed. in basket making. In our country coarse, strong baskets are made of shavings of long broad splint of various tough woods. In Japan and China commonly used materials are rattan and bamboo. The Chinese and Japanese excel in this manufacture of wares, their products being unrivaled for fineness and elegance.

Our North American Indians were at one time the most expert basket weavers in the world but this art has so deteriorated that now only the older Indians are

acquainted with it and certain tribes whose work was incomparably fine and beautiful have already lost the art.

Under the reservation system it was decided that the Indians need an industry to save them from sinking still lower. Lace making after Brussels and French patterns, was first superimposed on a Minnesota reservation and from that time to the present day has rapidly spread to other Indian tribes. The art of lace making developed by the European woman fits her like a glove, and quite as truly it may be stated that basket-making fits the Indian like a moccasin. Yet the Indians have been extremely succesful in lace making for they have remarkable skill with their fingers. An enlightened instructor of Indain affairs, has taken upon himself the task of human development in the right way and has made plans to revive basket making by introducing it into the government Indian schools, where the children, who now known nothing of this beautiful art, may learn from ^{the} only masters capable of teaching them, their own people.

Many hundred of thousands of dollars worth of baskets are every year imported from Japan and Germany. Thus money which by every right should be earned by our capable and needy Indians is being sent out of our country and far more than the money would be the satisfaction of doing what they do with surpassing skill for in the striving of the soul to make the impression adequate to the thought lies the highest possible and most extraordinary educative exercises of skill.