
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION
Bureau of American Ethnology
Bulletin 128

Anthropological Papers, No. 17

Art Processes in Birchbark of the River
Desert Algonquin, a Circumboreal Trait

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229

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| Introduction..... | 233 |
| Types of birchbark containers..... | 236 |
| Types of designs on Algonquin birchbark containers..... | 243 |
| The conscious elements of Algonquin design motivation..... | 268 |
| Chronology of design..... | 270 |
| Bibliography..... | 274 |

ILLUSTRATIONS

PLATES

| | |
|---|-----|
| 30. Birchbark containers, sap bucket, and round pail (River Desert Band) .. | 274 |
| 31. Birchbark containers (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 32. Birchbark sap pails and dishes (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 33. Birchbark trunk (River Desert Band) and baskets (Mattawa Band) .. | 274 |
| 34. Decorated birchbark containers (Timiskaming Band, Algonquin)..... | 274 |
| 35. Algonquin birchbark containers (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 36. Algonquin birchbark box with scene of beaver gnawing vegetation (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 37. Algonquin birchbark containers for household articles with floral figures in <i>sgraffito</i> designing and with sewed-on cut-out pattern decoration (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 38. Birchbark containers (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 39. Birchbark envelope container for bear bait (River Desert Algonquin, P. Q.) and birchbark container with spruce-root loops for decoration (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 40. Birchbark cut-out pattern markers for decorating bark containers, representing undefined varieties of flowers and leaves (River Desert Band)..... | 274 |
| 41. Camp of Algonquin birchbark worker and basket maker (Madenine Cesar) (River Desert Band, P. Q.)..... | 274 |
| 42. Mæckusi'k'we, "Beaver Meadow Woman" (Mrs. M. Buckshot), with decorated birchbark baby carrier for infant up to 1 month of age.. | 274 |

TEXT FIGURES

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3. Algonquin methods of sewing birchbark with stitches of spruce root in fastening the sides of containers. A basting tack..... | 237 |
| 4. Patterns for birchbark utensils (Algonquin)..... | 238 |
| 5. Rim reinforcements of Algonquin birchbark containers and decorative borders derived from them..... | 244 |
| 6. Decorations below rims of birchbark containers..... | 245 |
| 7. Decorations below rims of birchbark containers (River Desert Band) .. | 246 |
| 8. Decorations below rims of Algonquin birchbark containers..... | 247 |
| 9. Cut-out patterns for decorating birchbark containers (<i>a-e</i>) and animal figures from decorated objects (<i>f-i</i>) (River Desert Band)..... | 252 |

| | PAGE |
|--|------|
| 10. Realistic decorations on birchbark maple-sap, or water pail (River Desert Band)..... | 253 |
| 11. Designs from birchbark containers (Timiskaming Band)..... | 254 |
| 12. Designs on birchbark containers (River Desert and Mattawa Bands)..... | 255 |
| 13. Symmetrical band floral designs from birchbark containers (River Desert Band)..... | 256 |
| 14. Designs from sides of birchbark basket (River Desert Band)..... | 257 |
| 15. Birchbark cut-out patterns applied to surfaces of containers and baskets to outline decorative scraped-away designs (River Desert Band)..... | 258 |
| 16. Designs from birchbark vessels and baskets (Timiskaming and River Desert Bands)..... | 259 |
| 17. Element designs from birchbark wall pocket (<i>a-e</i>), and birchbark cut-out patterns for decoration of containers (<i>f-j</i>) (River Desert Band)..... | 260 |
| 18. Designs from sides of birchbark dishes (River Desert Band)..... | 261 |
| 19. Design elements from birchbark water pail (River Desert Band)..... | 263 |
| 20. Birchbark cut-out patterns for decorating containers, representing flowers (River Desert Band)..... | 264 |
| 21. Pattern stencils cut out of birchbark, used in decorating containers (River Desert Band)..... | 264 |
| 22. Birchbark cut-out patterns for decorating containers, and designs taken from decorated objects (River Desert Band)..... | 265 |
| 23. Designs from one side and end of birchbark container (Mattawa Band)..... | 266 |
| 24. Designs from birchbark containers (Mattawa Band)..... | 266 |
| 25. Assortment of plant-design elements from sides and covers of birchbark containers derived from cut-out patterns, mostly pseudorealistic representations of yellow pond lily (River Desert Band)..... | 267 |

ART PROCESSES IN BIRCHBARK OF THE RIVER DESERT ALGONQUIN, A CIRCUMBOREAL TRAIT

BY FRANK G. SPECK

INTRODUCTION

Knowledge of the area over which birchbark basketry is used and decorated in northeastern America has now been extended to include a wide area in the Province of Quebec, from the Ottawa River northward to the St. Maurice, Lake Barrier, and Grand Lake Victoria. This is the territory inhabited by various bands forming the quondam Algonquin Nation, now widely dispersed throughout the Canadian forest region of the upper Ottawa from the River du Lièvre on the east, taking in the Gatineau, Coulonge, and Dumoine Rivers, west to Lake Timiskaming and the frontier between Quebec and Ontario. A series of specimens of birchbark work from five bands of this historically famous group are to be found in the collections of a number of museums (as listed below), and seem sufficient to justify reproduction and discussion of the designs they offer as representing the work of the Algonquin proper. The specimens, numbering over 130, forming the original basis of this study, with locations and other pertinent data,¹ are as follows:

a. River Desert Band:

The National Museum of Canada (NMC),² 37 specimens, collected (1915-18) by E. Sapir and F. G. Speck.

The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation (MAI), 41 specimens, collected (1926-29) by F. G. Speck.

The University Museum, University of Pennsylvania (UPM), 7 specimens, collected (1929) by F. Johnson.

The National Museum of Denmark (NMD), 6+ specimens, collected (1928) by F. G. Speck.

The Denver Art Museum (DAM), 15 specimens, collected (1937) by F. G. Speck.

¹ A return to the River Desert Band in July 1937, made possible through a grant (No. 342) from the Faculty Research Fund, University of Pennsylvania, provided occasion for amplification of the manuscript in the field with the cooperation of informants as a final, and at the same time fortunate, step in its preparation. Opportunity was also afforded by this renewal of contact to examine 45 additional specimens of birchbark work of the band and to include discussion of their characteristics in the text. The investigation here presented is accordingly based upon study of 175 specimens of Algonquin birchbark containers.

² I desire to acknowledge the courtesy of Dr. Diamond Jenness, Director of Anthropology of the National Museum of Canada, in providing the opportunity to have the specimens of Algonquin decorated birchbark containers photographed and studied, in 1928, when they were lent to the University of Pennsylvania for the purpose.

b. River du Lièvre Band:

The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 5 specimens, collected (1928) by V. M. Petruccio.

c. Golden Lake Band:

The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 11 specimens, collected (1928) by F. Johnson.

d. Mattawa Band:

The National Museum of Canada (NMC), 3 specimens, collected (1915) by F. G. Speck.

e. Timiskaming Band:

The National Museum of Canada, 21 specimens, collected (1915) by F. G. Speck.

A more precise delineation of the territorial boundaries of these bands will be found in my recent report, covering the River Desert group (Speck, 1929) and in a study of 1915 dealing with the Timiskaming and River Dumoine Bands (Speck, 1915). During this period of field work the specimens and etymological notes forming the basis of the following report were obtained.

For the designs and bark work of the River du Lièvre band the illustrations and information given in an article by V. M. Petruccio (1929) have been used.

It is important to note before examining in detail the character of bark work and designs of the Algonquin that a close resemblance exists between the manufactures and decorations of this division and those of the Montagnais of Lake St. John (Speck, 1937), and that a marked differentiation is to be observed between the wares of these two when compared with those of the Têtes de Boule which intervene between the two, and those of the Barrière Indians, next neighbors on the north. In the case of the Têtes de Boule, we have the published results of the field work of D. S. Davidson (1928), whose collections from this tribe show almost no etched or scraped ornamentations on the sides of containers. A collection of bark objects from the Barrière Indians, made for the Museum of the American Indian by F. Johnson (1930, pp. 34-35), also shows the same lack of wall decorations on baskets. Aside from recognition of the efforts of those who by collecting actual material in the field have increased the portfolio of native art from which such studies as this are built, I am mindful of advantages derived from consultation in the preparation of the text with Dr. F. H. Douglas, Denver Art Museum; Dr. L. C. Eiseley, University of Kansas; and Dr. C. E. Schaeffer, University of Pennsylvania.

There has evidently been a factor at work in the St. Lawrence Valley and watershed affecting the art motives of the Algonquin and the Lake St. John Indians in a similar way; that is, toward profusion. And, in addition to this, the predominance of band-floral and leaf figures to the exclusion of human and animal forms has become char-

acteristic of both peoples. This is brought out in the illustrations of specimens now to be shown.

The scope of the following report is not limited to aspects of Algonquin art of the past. The forces active now in the historical development of decoration here may represent a continuity of systems employed in at least protohistoric times in the region occupied, not necessarily derived from association with Europeans. The assertion of European origin of the nongeometrical art forms of the northeastern Woodland tribes has frequently been made without adequate proof by writers dealing with the area. Despite evident influence of modern conditions which will continue to affect the growth or the decline of native crafts, certain principles of decoration will be manifest in the work of different tribal groups which bear witness to individual art traditions possessed by them. What their age may be it will only be possible to surmise in most respects. The decoration of useful articles for the pure satisfaction of such performance to their makers is evidently an ancient cultural trait of the Woodland peoples. The continuation and even increase of these products for trade within or without the group, in other words, for gain, is also to be inferred as a native characteristic of every age of tribal life in the region. Even a lax form of professionalism may be marked for past as well as present phases of life, for there have been and are the more expert canoe makers, bowmakers and the art creators whose manufactures are in demand, and who command admiration among members of their band. At the present time there may be observed in various families of the River Desert Algonquin objects preserved for their value and some of them in use which have come from the hands of some half dozen experienced bark workers; the creations of Mackusi-k-we (Mrs. Michele Buckshot) (pl. 42), Madenine Cesar (Mrs. Clement) (pl. 41) in particular, and some of the women of the MacDougal, Ottawa, and White Duck families. Thus there is traffic among the Indians themselves for the neatly made and decorated handicraft of their own experts. Commercialism has, to be sure, influenced the art industries of the band, as it has elsewhere among Indians of the historic period in general, increasing the demand and producing a spirit of competition, for which the object is gain. We may not, however, say that contact with Europeans has empirically created the art of the people. The impulse to decorate articles of use and to create fancy articles of minor utility, as well as to excel in their manufacture, should be credited distinctly to a native phase of culture. In their conversion from old to newer currents of progress through dealings with the encroaching civilized world, the Algonquin artists have grafted their tradition upon the latter and expanded it. The line to be drawn between antiques in native culture and those utensils customarily

used which have on their part acquired acculturational features, is in reality a hazy and ethnologically insignificant one on the horizon of native culture history. The accompanying paper is, then, intended to form a contribution to our knowledge of living art phases of a people rather than a reconstruction of their art as a cultural possession of the past. The River Desert Band is numerically on the increase (469 in 1923, 552 in 1937). With a revival of interest in folk art which, while not conspicuously imminent now, might take place under the stimulus of educational guidance, forces could swing into action to promote the decorative arts to a still further development. It need cause little surprise to find that pulsations of interest in the calling of art as a possibility for revenue have induced designers here to introduce cut-out pattern figures into their repertoire which seem strange to Indian traditions, such as the representation of a ribbon bowknot, a goblet, and even (1937) a representation of the Queen's (literally, "chief-woman's") coronation crown. This product was a spontaneous creation of Madeline Clement celebrating the occasion of the royal coronation in London in that year, an event which created some stir even among the distant Indian subjects of the Canadian backwoods. In the eyes of the historian who is interested in acculturation it also attests the vitality of an art in the process of acquiring the character of memorial documentation.

TYPES OF BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS

The five major types of bark containers and receptacles made and used by the Algonquin include the following, as they appear in the plates:

1. Wi'gwe'mat', "birchbark receptacle" (pls. 30, *a, b, c*; 31, *a*; 33, *b-f*; 34, *a-e*). A container of varying capacity, from 6 to 24 inches in length, with walls generally less in height than the length, and tapering in toward the top (construction pattern, fig. 4, *a*). The outside of the rim is reinforced with a maple hoop, bound on with spruce or basswood wrapping. It frequently has a fitted lid attached by a skin thong to prevent its loss. This container serves the purpose of sewing box, trunk, and general receptacle, as its name implies, for women's effects and men's tools and work materials. Food is also occasionally kept in it. The majority of these baskets, as they are termed locally, show decorative motives on their sides and lids. In the bush life the wi'gwe'mat' is an indispensable article of equipment although it is being replaced by the tin canister and pasteboard carton among the Indians who dwell near the precincts of civilization. The grain of the bark is *perpendicular* to the rim.

2. Kik'wanā'gan, "vessel" (pls. 30, *d, e, f*; 31, *b-e*). Similar in construction to the preceding type (pattern fig. 4, *a*), except that the sides are higher, a bale or carrying handle of basswood is provided

and the cover is lacking. The seams are coated with pitch made of spruce gum to make the vessel watertight.³ This is the carrying pail, of service in the transportation of maple sap in the sugar-making season, and of water to and from the spring. It is still used at all times except where it has become obsolete through the invasion of the commercial tin pail. Decorations on the sides are frequently seen. The grain of the bark is *perpendicular* to the rim.

3. P'ski'tanā'gan, "folded double" (pl. 32, *a, b, c, d*). A seamless

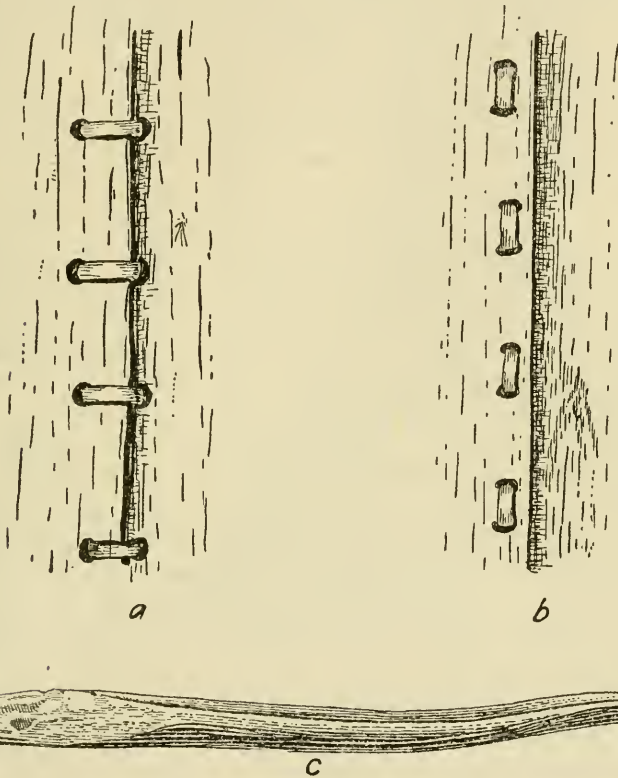


FIGURE 3.—Algonquin methods of sewing birch bark with stitches of spruce root in fastening the sides of containers. A basting tack.

a, b, Spruce root stitching; *c*, penis bone of black bear used in perforating bark for sewing with spruce roots (MAI, 16/4196). (For institutions indicated by initials see list on page 1. Catalog numbers are given when possible.)

bottomed, troughlike vessel constructed on the plan of pattern *c*, figure 4. The folded ends are sewn with spruce roots or the basswood inner bark (wi'gub'). This container, according to tradition over a wide region of the northern hunting area, is the original native

³ Other types of containers ("bottles") were made and employed as watertight receptacles. A bear's stomach, turned inside out, was used for bear's oil, whisky, etc. Similarly a loon's gullet or deer's stomach was blown up and stretched, and turned for use as a container. These vessels were fastened with a twist of basswood fiber at the neck. The ear of a moose or deer was split and dried for use as a match container.

cooking vessel. Having no seams it is naturally watertight. When placed over hot coals it will resist the action of heat, if thoroughly wet beforehand, sufficiently long to allow water or soup to boil. This operation has been witnessed by myself and others. In recent times the folded bark vessels have retreated from their position of former

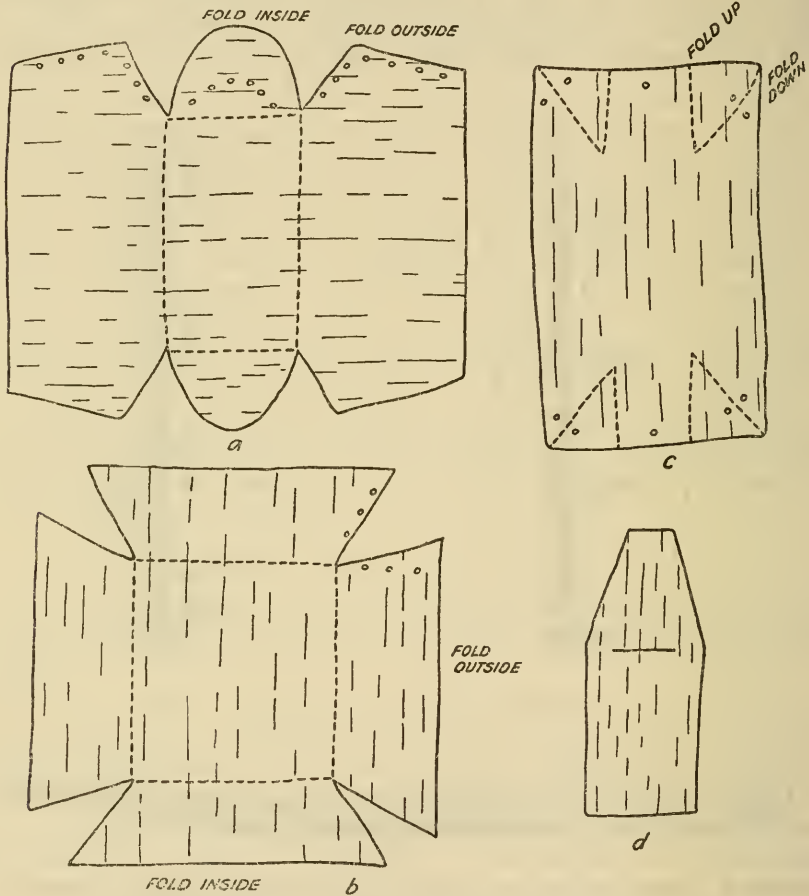


FIGURE 4.—Patterns for birchbark utensils (Algonquin).

a, Pattern for bark pail and container for berries and women's work materials (MAI, 16/4901); b, pattern for dish (MAI, 16/4900); c, pattern for seamless pail or boiler (MAI, 16/4902); d, pattern for rolled-up match box.

importance to become sap troughs or receptacles for other liquids about the camp or farm. The grain of the bark is *parallel* to the rim.

4. At'obā'gan, "pail" (pl. 32, e). A variation of the seamless vessel in which the ends are not folded over but merely bent together and caught with a fastening of the usual materials, spruce root or basswood fiber. It is used in the same manner as the preceding type,

usually for sap. Both of these containers (pl. 32, *c*, *d*) are of less permanent construction than the first two, and are not always provided with hoops to strengthen their rims. Nor are they so frequently decorated. The grain of the bark is *perpendicular* to the rim.

5. Wigwasanā'gan, "birchbark dish," (pl. 32, *f*). Constructed from the pattern (fig. 4, *b*), this dish is of wide distribution in the birchbark culture area. It serves the purpose of an eating dish or bowl among the more remote hunters who are as yet not so generously provided with utensils obtained from the traders. The dish or food tray has a hoop and is occasionally decorated.

6. Figure 4, *d*, shows the pattern for making the cylindrical match box, by which the bark strip is rolled to form a tube and the narrow end tucked into a slit which holds and conceals it. These boxes are made of a size to fit the matches used and are not decorated. They are made similarly, according to our present knowledge, eastward through the territory of the Montagnais-Naskapi.

7. Pski'tonā'ge, "folded." This equally simple type of construction is to be listed separately although in native terminology the same designation is given it as type 3. A rectangular sheet of bark is folded double, the two lateral edges sewn with a whip stitching of spruce root (or basswood inner bark) to form a simple envelope (pl. 39, *a*). A section of the top of the bark (or flap) is left so that it might be turned down over the open end. To keep it from curling, strips of cedar wood are fastened inside the folder as stiffeners. A variation in construction is to place the cedar strips outside the folder and bind them so tightly that nothing can enter the orifice. These receptacles serve the purpose of preserving dried, or even fresh meat, from insects and also for the storing of clothing. Frequently such a "meat bag" (wi'yās owac) is made of *green elm* or cedar bark, in which to store foods like dried beaver tail (amikwazo awac, "beaver tail folded holder") and dried fish (nam̄teḡ) for a period as long as a year. The larger sizes serve as folded trunks in which to store fur clothing during the summer. When packed in one of these envelopes with quantities of cedar boughs, the furs are safe from insects. The folder is also used for the simple purpose of holding bait suspended temptingly in a bear trap, as a specimen from Mrs. Buckshot demonstrates (the scraped-away representation appearing on the front of this bait holder (pl. 39, *a*) is that of the pitcherplant, *Sarracena purpurea*, a symbol of the trap that nature grows in the plant realm to ensnare insects).

The similitude of these bark folders to the parfleches of the Plains area is a feature of comparative ethnology not to be overlooked. It lies in their constructional simplicity and in their adaptation to the same economic purposes; namely, the preservation of dried meat and the storage of clothing. Spier has pointed out the characteristic

details of decoration which appear on the surfaces of the parfleches and their evident antiquity in Plains culture, and I have added some remarks along related lines in the study of birchbark techniques of the Montagnais (cf. Speck, 1937), showing that a similarity exists ostensibly between the primitive use of bark, or "tree skin" and animal skin, both serving in the raw state as materials of construction,⁴ and also have drawn attention to the techniques of their ornamentation in the Woodlands and on the Plains.⁵

It has been noted in describing the constructional types of Algonquin containers that the principle followed here is to cut and sew the bark so that the grain of the bark forming the longer side (usually the decorated wall) runs *perpendicular* to the rim. The same principle is followed by artisans in birchbark among all the tribal bands from here eastward through the territory of the Montagnais and the Wabanaki divisions. And westward the observation holds true for Ojibwa and Saulteaux bark baskets, judging from available specimens. Western Cree and Athabaskan series, however, predominantly show the bark cut and patterned so that the grain runs *parallel* with the rim. I regard this as a feature of considerable significance in the distribution of types.

While the forms of bark containers in the various Algonquin bands are also strikingly like those of the Lake St. John Montagnais, it is to be noted that the Algonquin manufacture and use the ash-splint baskets woven in the simple under-and-over twill as frequently

⁴ The textual quality of wet, green birch or elm bark (*par lécorceau*) closely resembles that of green rawhide (*parfleche*), a fact not without interest in the consideration of resemblances between Woodland bark containers and Plains rawhide receptacles, as discussed in the next paragraph.

The Canadian French term above has passed over into the vernacular of eastern Canada in the form of *corceau* (*cáso*), while in the English-speaking area the common term is *macock*, derived from Algonkian (cf. definition by A. F. Chamberlain, *Handbook of the American Indians*, 1911, pt. 1, p. 824).

⁵ As the most recent contribution to literature on incised parfleche decoration I quote from Frederick H. Douglas (1938, p. 25):

"The origin of the type and its historical relation to the painted parfleche are not known. The design styles of the two types appear to be identical. The oldest information known to me about painted parfleches is that given by the picture of one figured in the report of Maximilian's 1833-34 expedition. The design and technic are like those of later times. As noted by Wissler, Sioux tradition states that the incising of parfleches came before painting.

"There are two theories as to the origin of the technic. One suggests that it may be an adaptation of the scraped method of decorating birchbark utensils, and the second ascribes it to the influence of Spanish methods of decorating leather horse furnishings.

"In support of the first it may be said that the Eastern Sioux certainly used birchbark; and that much birchbark was decorated by scraping. But the present center of incised parfleches is far from that of scraped bark. Dr. Verne Ray tells me that birchbark articles from near the incised parfleche area, as it is known from existing specimens, are not scraped or incised. The Crow crupper and sword case mentioned above are the evidence for the suggested Spanish origin of the practice. The Indian undoubtedly used Spanish horse furniture as a model for his own. Spanish leather was decorated by tooling, cutting and stamping, according to Arthur Woodward. The suggestion is that the Indian endeavored to imitate the effects created by these technics by means familiar to him, cutting and scraping. If he achieved effects pleasing to him on horse furniture, it seems as though the same methods might very well have been applied to other leather-work."

In another paper Dr. Douglas lists 53 tribes which used parfleches. "Of these the scanty available evidence ascribes incised parfleches to but five, Yakima, Sanpoil, Warm Springs, Crow and Nez Percé." [Douglas, (1936).]

as they do the bark wares.⁶ The distribution of splint basketry, however, ends with the boundaries of the Algonquin proper going northward. It is not to be found among the Têtes de Boule, the Barrière Indians, or the Montagnais-Naskapi.⁷ Evidently the art of splint basketry has been creeping northward since the contacts of Algonquin bands with the Iroquois have begun. The reason for this assumption in regard to the origin of basketwork among more southern tribes may be found in pure ethnological theory, for the splint basket types of the Algonquin and the Iroquois are indistinguishable. The Algonquin, being thrown into association, even cohabitation, with the Iroquois subsequent to the establishment of the missions on the St. Lawrence two centuries ago, have undoubtedly developed the craft in common with the Iroquois.⁸ I have made reference to this idea in two previous papers (Speck, 1920, p. 67; 1927, pp. 242-246).

It will be observed from the illustrations of Algonquin bark wares that the forms correspond to those of the Montagnais throughout, except that the ovoid forms of the latter are absent among the Algonquin,⁹ and the cylindrical are infrequent.

As for other particulars, we observe the wider base and narrower mouth, and the hoop of wood with spruce-root wrappings, which wrappings are never colored to produce the decorative effect that one finds on Têtes de Boule and Mistassini bark containers. Several divergences, in the form of basswood material sometimes employed for the wrappings, and the habit of more frequently applying pitch to the seams, mark off the work of the Algonquin from that of the Montagnais. The latter peculiarities appear more frequently as the border of the Ojibwa habitat is approached. The impression obtained from observing a series of Algonquin containers is that of constructional similarity with those of the Ojibwa, not only in the use of pitch for covering the seams but in the use of basswood bark for the binding material of the rims and occasionally for the seam stitching, and the use of hazelwood for the hoops. These peculiarities never appear in Montagnais bark containers. It will, however, be only when larger series of Ojibwa bark baskets shall have been collected, and especially those showing surface decorations which are as yet rare or absent altogether, that the diffusion of influence can be traced in this direction. The study made by Miss Densmore (1928, 1929) of birchbark forms and decoration in bitten patterns

⁶ This simplest form of basket production ranges eastward to the Wabanaki as the sole technique there.

⁷ The few specimens of ash-splint basketry collected at Lake St. John have in every case been traced to the hands of St. Francis Abenaki women who have migrated northward since about 1860 to join the Montagnais at Chicoutimi and Lake St. John.

⁸ Specimens collected from the Iroquois at Lake of Two Mountains (Oka) in support of this statement are to be found in the collections of the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation.

⁹ The Montagnais form of this container is shown in Speck, 1937, pl. 1, *h*; pl. 18, *a, b, c*.

employed as suggestions for moccasin decoration affords some idea of general common properties in bark craftsmanship between the two peoples.

Further observation of constructive details of the bark work of the River Desert Band shows that the pattern outlines of the containers of type 1 result in the line of joining (the construction seams on the lower ends of the vessel) being nearer the bottom than in forms seen among bands inhabiting districts to the north and west. The constructed form is, therefore, similar to the work of the Montagnais on the east. The same holds true of the work of all of the Algonquin proper as far west as and including the Indians of Lake Timagami who are to be ethnologically classified with the Ojibwa. These remarks are based upon material collected by myself from the bands concerned, and reposing in the National Museum of Canada. Therefore an area may be designated for this peculiarity of construction which would include also the next characteristic of technique; namely, the "basting" or "tack" stitch in the sewing of the bark with the spruce-root split (wa'dap'). The tack stitch predominates, almost one might note, exclusively, in the method of bark attachment of this area. (The term "tack stitch" denotes that type in which the threaded root is made to penetrate the bark upward and down again within a short space, generally less than $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch, then runs under the surface for a space of from 1 to 2 inches and comes out again, the whole attachment resembling the operation of "basting.") (See fig. 3, *b*.) Like the pattern outline just mentioned, this stitch predominates in Montagnais work and throughout the work of the Algonquin proper. To the north and west it gives way to a more complicated and artistic type of stitching, the "embroidery" stitch, in which the stitches are made to form a solid line touching each other, each advancing stitch being made to come up through the preceding one. The latter is characteristic of Têtes de Boule work and that of the Cree to the north and west, and especially of the bark sewing of the Athabaskan divisions. The tack stitch, it may be added, is a characteristic of the work of the Wabanaki groups as well. Its distribution also seems to include the Ojibwa about the Great Lakes, as observed in old specimens. The few specimens extant from the Beothuk also show the same. Whence it may be considered as an old seaming technique, possibly antedating the "embroidery" type.

The rim wrapping of Algonquin birchbark containers is of spruce root (wa'dap') in most instances, though shreds of boiled inner bark of basswood (wi'gub') and elm are occasionally substituted, since these materials are resorted to in the economy of the forests. When ash-splint baskets are being made, the presence of available strips of this material accounts for its use in fastening and rim binding. The rim wrapping is close and undecorated, the spruce roots being left in

their natural color, except in a very few specimens where a dark shade appears as a result of being allowed to soak in tainted water. No cases of imbrication with quills or colored strands of material have been observed in the series of River Desert specimens examined, although they are invariably found in the bark work of the adjacent Têtes de Boule, and among the Cree to the northwest.

Another feature in the construction of bark containers of the Algonquin in general, as well as of the River Desert Band, is the fitted lid, with a hoop or "cuff" underneath, stitched with the binding material to the under side of the cover, and fitting inside the mouth of the vessel. This virtually necessitates that the rim have one hoop (maple) on the outer side only. One might venture a hazard that any critical ethnologist who at a glance compares this cover with the constructive features of European boxes would pronounce it an innovation derived from contact with white people. And it may, indeed, be true. The same type of cover appears in the containers of the Montagnais to the eastward, but it becomes rarer in passing to the west and is replaced by the flat lid without cuff among the Cree and the Athabaskan groups. Among the latter it is a cover tied loosely to the rim of the container by strips of leather.

It should also be mentioned here as an incident in the history of change in form of containers that an innovation has recently appeared in the types made by workers in this band (1938). Rectangular boxes sewed at the four corners, provided with fitted lids and decorated in the usual manner are being produced. I have not been able to trace the origin of this shape to my own satisfaction.

TYPES OF DESIGNS ON ALGONQUIN BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS

The Algonquin techniques of design, namely, the production of patterns on the dark surface of spring-peeled bark, by moistening and then scratching away the softened layer surrounding the pattern, as described for the Lake St. John Indians (Montagnais), follows identically the process of the latter tribe. The employment of bitten birchbark (*miži'ni'katowá*⁹, "picture-biting") and cut-out birchbark (*mažine'žiga*⁹, "picture-cut") patterns is fully as characteristic here as in the aforementioned tribe.¹⁰ Perhaps even more does the

⁹ The sequence of bitten pattern for decorative suggestion and symmetrical designs derived therefrom is fundamental to the Ojibwa of Minnesota as well. Miss Densmore's report is one of the few on this area to mention the bitten patterns, or transparencies, in the evolution of design. The Ojibwa she describes do not, however, work these patterns into bark-vessel decoration but use them for designing beaded bands. (Densmore, 1929, pp. 184-185, figs. 22-24.) The Algonquin do not invariably transfer the bitten patterns to their decorated bark objects but practice pattern biting for an amusement. The same is true of the Penobscot. (See Speck, 1940, 185-186.) And while both groups are alike in this respect, they regard the patterns so produced to be suggestive of the geometrical and floral figures that are produced in their art. For these two peoples, at least, there is a gap in the sequence of evolution from bitten patterns to bark decoration. There is some meaning in the Algonquin designation *mažini'žegan miguzéwinabéžuwe*, "cut-out decoration," applied to bark ornamentation, as respects the evolution of art. Davidson (1928, footnote 6, p. 2a) also has treatment of bitten patterns in art composition of the Têtes de Boule.

River Desert Algonquin women rely upon her cut-outs for the transfer of pattern to her basket than does the artist at work farther north. And, again, the appearance of geometrical decorations in the bark etching is less frequently met with here than to the northward. An examination of designs, furthermore, shows the Algonquin, especially the bands nearer to the Ojibwa of Ontario, to be somewhat more given to the use of animal and human outlines for ornamentation than the Montagnais.

But the feature of striking importance in a comparison of the bark-basket art motivation of this and the adjacent areas occurs in the

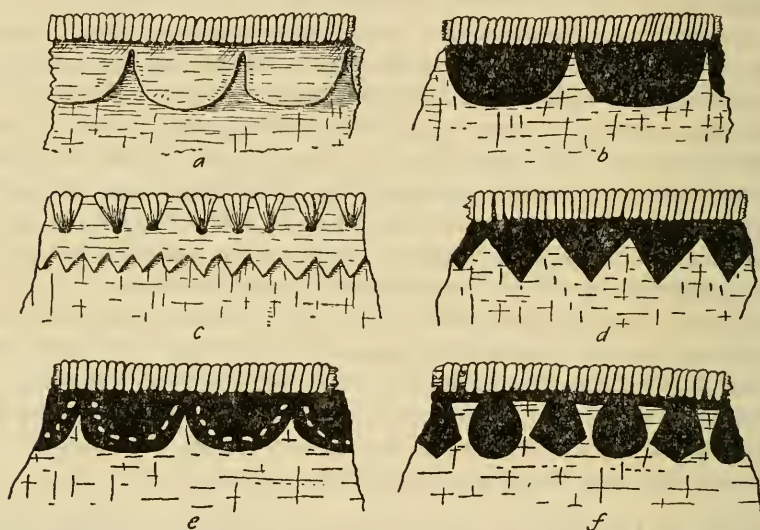


FIGURE 5.—Rim reinforcements of Algonquin birchbark containers and decorative borders derived from them.

a, Rim with birchbark reinforcement below hoop for strengthening and for decorative effect, River Desert Band (NMC); *b*, representation of reinforcement in scraped-away design for decoration, River Desert Band (NMC); *c*, rim reinforcement, River Desert Band; *d*, representation of same, River Desert Band; *e*, *f*, elaborated representations of reinforcement principle, Timiskaming Band and River Desert Band, respectively (NMC).

decoration of the space just below the hoop and rim, with an encircling band of varied outlines. It is found in so many of the Algonquin bark objects as to challenge attention to its origin and its meaning in the puzzle of design distribution.¹¹ This particular feature is shown in the sketches in figures 5-8 and plates 30, 31. At first glance, indeed, it would seem probable that its origin might lie in some detail of construction, for technical precursors of decoration have always a high probability as explanatory suggestions. In this case there is reason to close the assumption with an affirmative solution. Specimens in

¹¹ Boas (1927, p. 55) emphasizes the importance of rim binding in North America and Siberia, both as a technical feature and as a field of decoration: "In a bark basket the rim must be strengthened by a band, to prevent splitting, and the band and the sewing set off the rim from the body."

the National Museum of Canada from the River Desert Band, and from the Golden Lake Band in the Museum of the American Indian, and others recently (1937) added to the series—half a dozen in all—are found to have a reinforcement of birchbark sewed into the rim and extending a short way below it. This takes the form of a cut-out decoration as well as a reinforcement, serving the double objective of decoration and of strengthening. Among the Indians this feature of construction is called the "canoe wrapping," since it is so often resorted to in sewing the gunwales of canoes where the bark of the sides join them, as a measure of strengthening the attachment. It also functions similarly in leather work as shown in the edging of moccasins.

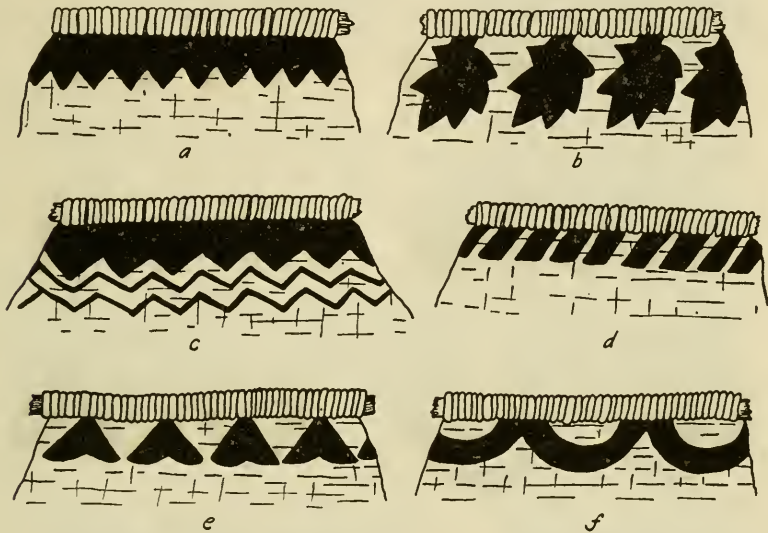


FIGURE 6.—Decorations below rims of birchbark containers.

a, b, River Desert Band (NMC, III, L, 19, 20); c, d, Timagami Band (NMC, III, G, 248, 256); e, from birchbark dish (NMD); f, dish, River Desert Band (MAI, 16/1597) and dish 4½-inches in diameter (NMD).

Just why this peculiarity of bark-basket construction should occur with such frequency among the Algonquin and not among the Montagnais is, however, not so simple to explain. Whether or not it has a distribution to the west or northwest in the direction of the Cree and Saulteaux remains to be found out. At present it would seem that it has, judging from the few specimens of Cree birchbark basketry that are available from the Saskatchewan area. We may hardly speculate further in this direction at the present time.

The occurrence of the bark rim reinforcement in baskets of birchbark of the Athabaskan and Sahaptian Tribes is stressed by Boas (*in* Teit, 1909, pp. 477-478), raising a question as to the history of this particular feature of construction that calls for more information on bark wares of the intervening territories.

In the decoration of the surface of the birchbark, it should be noted for the Algonquin that both the negative, and, to a slight extent, the positive, methods of bringing out designs are employed. In the former the cut-out stencil is placed upon the dark surface of the material and the area around the pattern is scraped away until the lighter undersurface is exposed. It bears the designation *sgraffito*, "scraped." The design is accordingly not scratched into the dark coating of the bark, as it is in the positive process, but is left in the negative state after the background has been taken away.¹² All the bark decoration of this and the immediately neighboring groups follows this scheme, while the distant Wabanaki tribes,¹³ and the

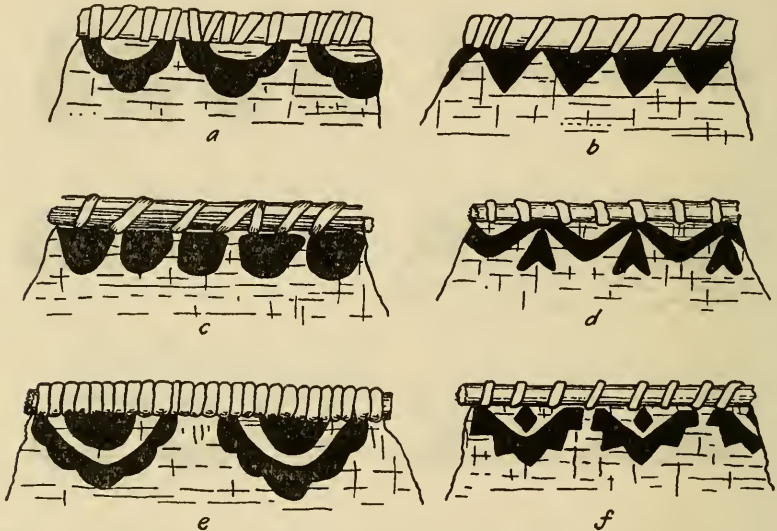


FIGURE 7.—Decorations below rims of birchbark containers (River Desert Band).

a, b, c, From birchbark dishes, 10, 8, and 4 inches in diameter, respectively (MAI and NMD, 2 specimens); *d*, dish, 8 inches (NMD); *e*, pail (MAI); *f*, dish, 8 inches (NMD).

Ojibwa¹⁴ in some places, employ exclusively the positive (inscribed) process. The combining of the two, however, takes a certain form among the Algonquin, as well as, to a slight extent, among the Montagnais. In these cases the interior of the space within the design is scraped out by the positive method, producing a smaller figure which follows in outline the general contour of the larger one. The effect is to show something suggesting partial open work. It is, however,

¹² That *sgraffito* decoration in the Old World had so short a life-span as a development in ornamental technique (*sgraffito* was done on a coating of plaster at Bologna up until the seventeenth century), has been something of a puzzle to students of the history of art. A similar process occurs in calabash decoration in the West Indies and in enamel decoration in Mexico.

¹³ For illustrations of Penobscot decorations of this type, see Speck (1927 and 1940).

¹⁴ Specimens procured from the Indians of Long Lac, Ontario, show the positive process in producing geometrical designs.

not a common type of ornamentation, but one evidently favored by certain more skilled operators (fig. 24, *a*; pl. 33, *c*). One of the three specimens from the Mattawa Band and some of those from the River du Lièvre Band show this development well worked out (pl. 33, *c*, and Petruccio, 1929, figs. 66 to 69).

The containers (pl. 34) made by women of the Timiskaming Band show some deviation in ornamental conception from those of the eastern bands of the Algonquin, in the greater frequency of their animal figures. We might attribute this to the influence of the

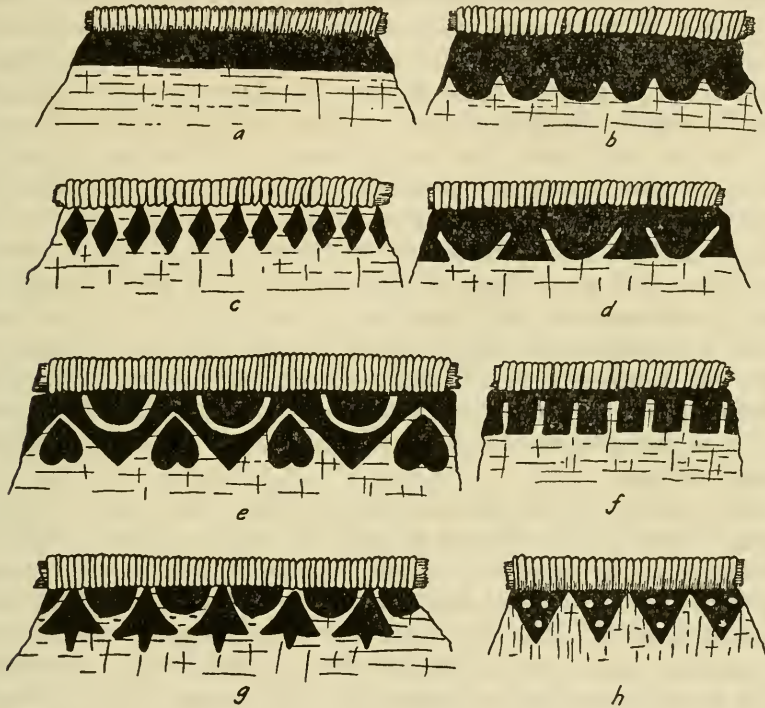


FIGURE 8.—Decorations below rims of Algonquin birchbark containers.

a, Timiskaming Band (NMC, III, L, 108); *b, c, d*, Mattawa Band (NMC, III, L, 189-91); *e*, River Desert Band (Rochester Municipal Mus.); *f*, Timagami Band (NMC); *g, h*, River Desert Band (MAI, 16/1595).

Ojibwa in the older phases of whose art animal forms are outstanding.¹⁵

Discussion of the decorative devices of this band would not be complete without mention of the process of sewing the birchbark cut-out figures themselves directly to the surface of the container with an edge stitching of spruce roots. This ornamental technique, called *mi'ndjiməgwā'de*, is shown in figures *a, d*, plate 37. In these instances the cut-out figures are applied directly to the surface to form a positive motive of embellishment. No medium of transfer is brought into

¹⁵ Among the River Desert people esthetic appreciation seems to have turned in favor of floral designs, as typified by Mrs. Buckshot (see page 257).

play, as in the case of the incised or scraped-away designing. It possesses an elemental character as one might estimate the growth of the decorative impulse from an historical point of view.¹⁶ Yet no conclusions should be drawn from the nature of its simplicity or from its distribution until wider surveys and a fuller background of knowledge of changes in styles of ornamentation have come into our hands. As inquiry reveals, the functional purpose served by this particular device of ornamentation is, however, perfectly clear in the case of the artists of the River Desert Band. The sewed-on cut-out figures appear on the sides of containers only when these are made of "summer" bark. This seasonal phase of the material lacks the dark coating on its inner surface which alone makes the "scraped-away", *sgraffito*, process possible to be performed. There is, accordingly, no other manner in which decorated outlines could be applied than to cut them out and stitch them on, unless it would be by the use of colors, and this process, for some unexplained reason, has not been adopted in the area. Stitching-on is, then, a substitution for the more usual form of ornamentation when required by the nature of materials. And when, through paucity of winter bark, vessels are made of both summer and winter bark on opposite sides of the same article, then both processes of decoration are thought of. Four specimens, the handicraft of Madenine Cesar, have been obtained as evidence of the technique (pl. 37), and Mrs. Buckshot was familiar with it in her tradition of local methods preserved from the time of her childhood.

Here, in short, is a technique of decoration which still retains its pattern source in full evidence as an initial step in designing without transfer to another medium. Sewed-on patterns are reserved for the garnishment of containers made of bark taken off in the summer time, as has been noted. The specimens show admirably the utilization of the sewed-on process as a substitute for scraping designs on surfaces which would otherwise be impossible to decorate. The objects in question are made of part summer bark and part winter bark, which would result in a one-side-only ornamentation distasteful to the maker. This explanation was given by both women who employed the device. One might wonder in turn why the idea of painting or stamping designs had not presented itself as an alternative in such cases. But it should be noted that Mrs. Buckshot (74 years of age), one of the oldest artisans of the band, could not testify to having ever seen bark containers so embellished, i. e., with figures in color. And this despite the recollection that stamped designs were applied to

¹⁶ As actually happened, in one instance a cut-out pattern of a "coiled snake" used for *sgraffito* on a container was later found sewed as an ornament upon a birchbark cup made of summer bark, and collected by J. Patman.

leather articles of clothing.¹⁷ The sewed-on development seems to be practiced by only a few women of the band (Madenine Cesar, in particular) so far as contemporary material from the Quebec Algonquin shows. Its appearance in the series of bark designing processes is significant in the history of northern Indian art, and somewhat exceptional forthwith.

An extreme development of the cut-out, sewed-on technique is remarkable in the work of groups in Saskatchewan (Athabaskan and Cree), but how this relates to the similar, though weaker, development of the art so much farther east is to remain an unsettled question until intervening phases of artcraft have become known. Among the western groups referred to, the birchbark used in construction of containers is the "uncoated" (summer) bark, from which it is evident that a connection exists between the use of sewed-on patterns and the uncoated bark.¹⁸

There is still another feebly manifested inclination on the part of River Desert birchbark decorators to employ the idea of stitch-designing, or, as it might be termed, spruce-root embroidery. In this form of decoration the spruce root is treated as one would a thread to form a coarse embroidered outline. The figures so produced among Algonquin craftsmen are usually simple and geometrical and are not filled in. Neither are plant or animal outlines in evidence. This technique is here only a weak and incidental feature in the series of ornamental tricks. It would seem to be an adaptation of a functional process of sewed-fastenings to decorative purposes. Again we meet with this feature of root-designing among the Cree of Saskatchewan, in the same area where the sewed-on cut-outs are prevalent. A carry-over from the splint-basketry-rim fancy work of Algonquin (*kidji'gəni'ga'*, "fancy-work") and Iroquois baskets appears in one example collected at River Desert (pl. 39). In the case mentioned it happens that the artist (Madenine Cesar) of her own accord combined the sewed-on, cut-out ornamentation with the spruce-root rim loop fancy work—both of them rather exceptional in the local forms of decoration.

A survey and interpretation of the historical meaning of the spruce-root stitching and the cut-out, sewed-on designs leads to consideration of the possibility that these techniques may be antecedent to the porcupine-quill mosaic process which appears sporadically among Algonkian peoples in the Great Lakes region and the East. Spruce-root designing is associated with a skeuomorphic source of ornamentation. Porcupine-quill designing stands out as being conceptual and

¹⁷ A specimen of deerskin leggings, worn by her defunct husband in winter, was so ornamented by Mrs. Bucksbot.

¹⁸ In the collections of the Denver Art Museum are some Wisconsin Ojibwa containers with designs in surface painting, while examples of "sewed-on" figures in birchbark from the Ojibwa of Minnesota, identical with those figured in this paper, are reported in the same collection by Dr. F. H. Douglas.

more definitely esthetic. The solidly filled decorated areas of birch-bark decoration in porcupine-quill mosaic bear resemblance to the solid areas of the bark cut-out decorations, and where the spruce-root stitching is arranged to form open decorative patterns a similarity appears to the open-work porcupine-quill small leaflike figures produced in some central Algonkian bands. This is especially true of work of tribes in the Cree-Athabaskan area where the roots are dyed in colors. Such connections, however, have little bearing upon the types of decorations in favor among the Algonquin proper, for it may be noted now that attempts on the part of the latter to utilize porcupine quills are few and irregular. The Algonquin have not adopted this form of bark decoration, either through the influence of their Ojibwa neighbors 200 miles to the westward or through their own art initiative.

The resort to the use of bitten patterns for the production of suggestions of design outlines to be transferred to the sides of bark containers, a practice so characteristic among the Montagnais, is one, however, not entirely overlooked by artists among the Algonquin. Not all, however, are capable, through having been provided by nature with opposed pointed teeth to make design biting feasible, of operating their creative desires in this fashion. Madenine Cesar (Mrs. Pierre Clement), for instance, who is rated the most gifted among the River Desert Algonquin in this line, finds a particular and a rich inspiration in designs bitten in outline into thin folded layers of the inner membrane of birchbark. Mackusi'k'we, "Fair Meadow Woman" (Mrs. Buckshot), on the other hand, produces her designs for bark work by the cutting-out method. Both, however, achieve plant and floral patterns by their preferred systems. Madenine Cesar furthermore utilizes the bitten patterns usually for silk, yarn, or beadwork, by basting the bitten figures after they have been trimmed out upon the surface to be decorated and stitching the beads or colored thread atop the pattern. (Among bands more closely in contact with trade sources, patterns of paper are similarly used, the pattern beneath the finished design being picked out with a needle afterward to remove it.) Madenine Cesar, nevertheless, constantly uses cut-out figures for her bark decorations. I would regard the cut-out process for the present time (1930-38) to be more characteristic of designing in birchbark ornamentation among the River Desert Algonquin.¹⁹

The method of producing patterns by means of biting may be described in more detail. They are usually executed upon a thin sheet

¹⁹ Since the above was written I had occasion again to observe Mrs. Buckshot, in the summer of 1938, making some thin birchbark patterns by folding the sheet double and cutting the outline desired on one side only with scissors, producing a half-image in profile. This formed a single flower when opened up. This led me to inquire further, and it developed that she sometimes resorted to the method in trying out for new floral ideas. Folded symmetrical patterns are not, however, made to produce a string of connected cut-out figures, as they are in the attenuated paper cut-out patterns snipped out by white children.

or membrane of inner birchbark folded once or twice. The biting is done forcibly between opposing pointed teeth, usually the canines. The sheet is turned to this side and that, moved forward and back to track a series of impressions forcibly indented without perforating the material. The results are ovals, curves and radiating lines. Then the sheet is removed from the mouth and opened up, displaying symmetrical figures suggesting highly varied life forms to the beholder. Blind imagination alone directs the movements to produce outlines—imagination enriched by experience and maxillary control. For the most part they are given floral interpretations. The figures assume a still more marvelous character when held up to the light as transparencies. Next comes their utilization in the decorative system. Here among the River Desert people they are cut out with scissors and laid as patterns upon surfaces to be ornamented with beads or silk embroidery. Only rarely, we are told, are they employed as patterns for birchbark decoration when found suitable in the eyes of their creators.

The design register of the Algonquin is not a very definite one as far as interpretation goes, nor is it particularly circumscribed in range. The functionally explainable border patterns on the surface below the rims of bark containers, discussed on a previous page (244), are apparently the most fixed characteristic that we can observe and a constant one among all the bands of Algonquin classification.

The portrayal of human and animal forms covers the usual range of male and female, moose, deer, bear, dog, mink, otter, partridge, loon, duck, and beaver (figs. 9, 10, 11). Animal motifs are more numerous among the Timiskaming band, whose affinity in culture with the Ojibwa is marked (fig. 11).

The band floral figures so suggestive of Montagnais work are common in combination with simple loose elements (figs. 13, *b, c, d*; 14, *b*).

The smaller single elements of decoration (figs. 17, 19, 22) are strikingly present, however, in Algonquin ornamentation. In composition over a broad surface they seem to form a favorite style of embellishment, as will be noticed by examining the sides of decorated bark pails and baskets (pls. 30, *d, e, f, g*; 31). Among these elements the outlines of leaf (ani'bi·c), berry (mi'na'n') bud, flowers (wāpi'gwun), and stems predominate. And it should be noted that the Indian's fondness for playing cards has prompted the adoption of the diamond (kayes'a'wes'ak) (figs. 19, 22), heart (wāde''), club, and spade (both called leaves), so popular and appealing to the eye of mankind everywhere. In several instances the ribbon bow appears as a design pattern.²⁰ The Algonquin artist is perfectly conscious of the origin of these particular patterns in her repertoire. Among all of those questioned, however, a native source of conception is claimed for the other simple pattern elements. Among these is

²⁰ Represented by a specimen in the Denver Art Museum.



FIGURE 9.—Cut-out patterns for decorating birchbark containers (*a-e*), and animal figures from decorated objects (*f-i*) (River Desert Band).

a, Partridge; *b*, bear; *c*, bear making his mark on tree; *d*, moose; *e*, beaver; *f*, deer; *g*, beaver; *h*, otter; *i*, duck.

emphatically the "arch" (ci'ba'usa) (figs. 14, c; 21, b; 23, b), which may have formerly been a representation of the rainbow (adegwa'ni'bi'sa, "holds back water"). The figure is consistently prominent with sky concepts of the area, although the informants do not so apply it now. The ellipse, the stem with three leaves, trefoil (both called



FIGURE 10.—Realistic decorations on birchbark maple-sap, or water pail (River Desert Band).

A dog chasing a partridge, and man and wife engaged in tapping sugar maple and collecting sap. The sugar barrel is shown at left. The spill inserted in the tree and sap pail at right. The bulge on the tree trunk is a burl out of which wooden food bowls are made.

ani'bi'c, "leaf"), the dome, the "toad's legging" or pitcherplant (pls. 1, d, e, f, g; (omakaki'mi'ta's) or twist,²¹ the scallop, and the dome with

²¹ This figure represents the leaf of the pitcherplant (*Sarracena purpurea*), which has similar significance in Ojibwa etymology (cf. Densmore, 1929, p. 14; 1928, p. 379). In Penobscot symbolism this is the "addle-head," or fern crozier, underlying the double-curve series. Here it is also a powerful antidote.

serrations on its straight edge (fig. 19, *d*),²² are among those of an old native derivation, according to the testimony of their users.

For several others, namely, the mapleleaf (*ana'tukw ani'bi'c*) and the five-pointed star (fig. 16, *a*) and the cross (*tc'i-ba'iatək*, "ghost-

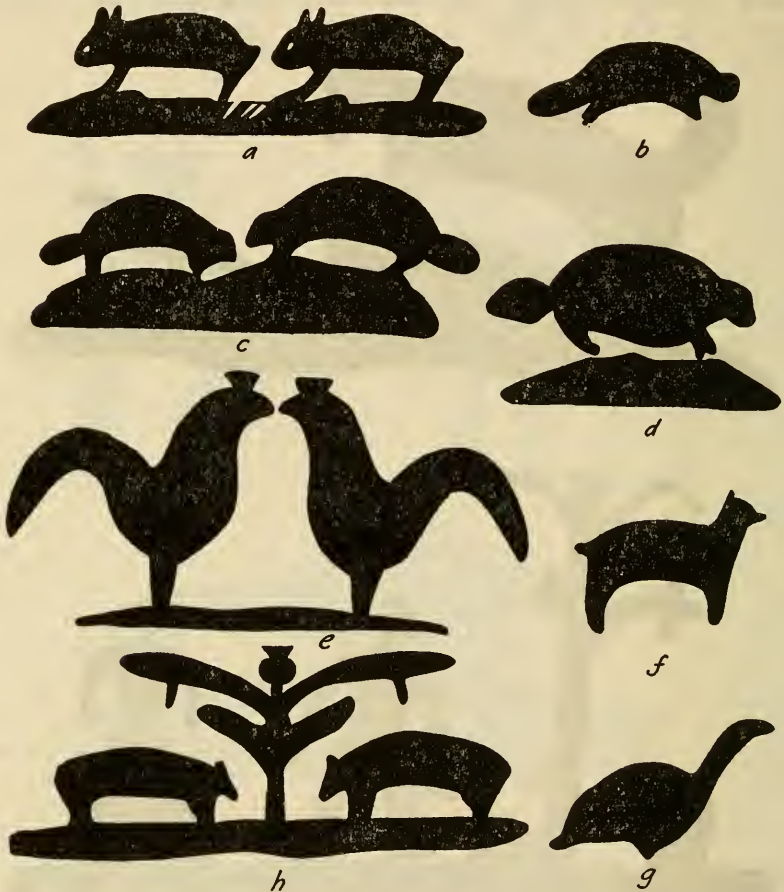


FIGURE 11.—Designs from birchbark containers (Timiskaming Band).

a, Hares (NMC, III, L, 103); *b*, beaver (NMC, III, L, 102); *c*, beavers opposed; *d*, beaver (NMC, III, L, 101); *e*, cocks opposed symmetrically (NMC, III, L, 103); *f*, *g*, doe and duck (on opposite sides of basket) (NMC, III, L, 102); *h*, bears opposed symmetrically under "double-curve" tree (NMC, L, 100).

²² An identical figure occurs in Delaware art under the name of "flame." To the Delaware this figure is an ancient one by tradition, as stated by Tom Half Moon's wife, who employed it in her bead-and-ribbon work. Since the figure, which attracted some attention through these occurrences, is a possible legacy in the art register of the woodlands from an early period, I took occasion to make a casual search for its appearance in the designs of living groups and in archeological material. Results so far have been to show its occurrence in Winnebago beadwork and Delaware-Munsee ribbon work, in Osage beadwork on a cloth coat, and finally (most significantly) as an incised ornamentation upon the body of a vessel excavated by Clarence B. Moore in a mound on Black Warrior River, Ala., and figured in the *Journal of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia*, 2d Ser., vol. 13, pt. 2, 1905, fig. 74, p. 183. In all of these instances its form is identical with the figure illustrated herewith (fig. 19, *d*). Whence the native estimate of its age and character may be considered as worthy of further attention by investigators of art history in the East.

wood"),²³ a similar nativity is asserted, but I would quite agree with the sceptic who, upon critical consideration, places these, with the card emblems, in the category of patterns borrowed recently, that is, within 50 years, from decorations in common use among the Canadians.

The element designs, nevertheless, lie strictly within the constructional realm of the bark cut-out stencil patterns and we cannot deny without sufficient proof that they are as indigenous to the old art life of the region as the cut-out process itself is. After setting to one side those designs whose European origin need not be questioned, we observe the remainder to form elements in the ornamentations of peoples in the north as far as the Cree, the Naskapi, and others.

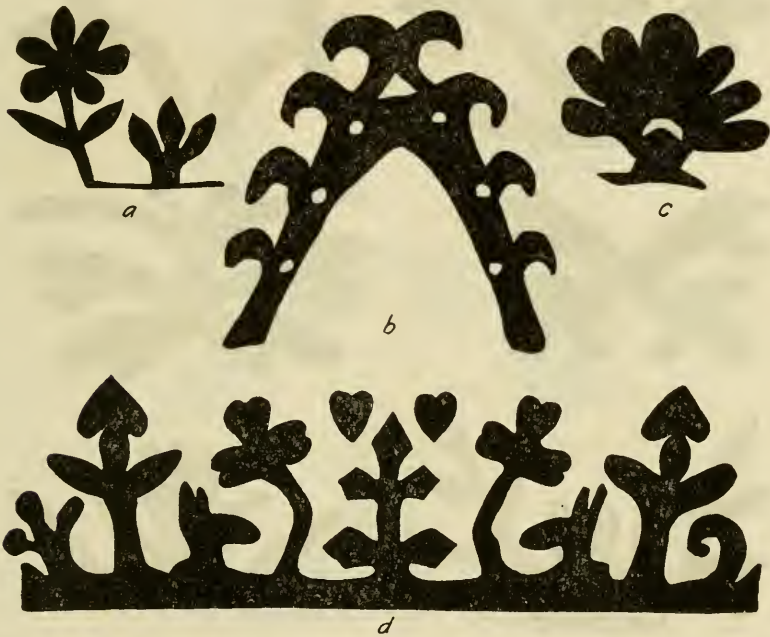


FIGURE 12.—Designs on birchbark containers (River Desert and Mattawa Bands).

a, b, c, Designs from sides and ends of bark container (Mattawa Band) (NMC, III, L, 191); *d*, scene from side of basket, representing hares' heads in setting of forest profile, as interpreted by Mrs. Buckshot (River Desert Band) (NMC, III, L, 89).

Thus, it would seem, there existed an old category of design elements, common to a wide area in the northeast, which has descended more or less intact among the dispersed populations, suffering in the course of time some losses from the original body of motives as well as some accretions from the outside. And finally, whether the cut-out figures have ever possessed a different symbolism than they now have (see

²³ The figure 14, *a*, is an unusually suggestive conception of the River Desert artist. She has combined the "cross" figure with that of the heart of Christ shown in the middle of the group, and, being unable to resist the habit of tradition, has introduced a floral modification above the heart and turned the arms of the cross into leaf figures.

p. 270), they have come to acquire a floral connotation, under the native name, pa'gwədji' wapi'gwun, "wild (or orphan) flowers." The cut-out patterns appearing in such profusion upon Algonquin bark receptacles are for the most part unspecified varieties of these growths.

In the design register of this band the representation of the yellow water lily (*Nymphaea advena*) is repeated with great frequency and in a variety of modifications which do not always betray its identity to European eyes. Rarely are the botanic features so realistically

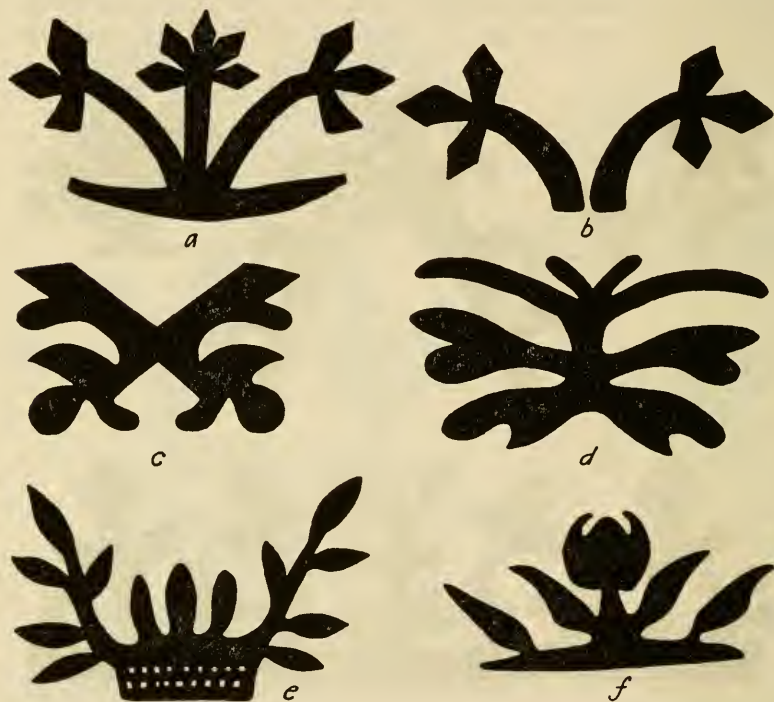


FIGURE 13.—Symmetrical band floral designs from birchbark containers (River Desert Band).

a, b, Flowers, on sides of baskets (NMC, III, L, 19, 20); c, d, from opposite sides of same container (III, L, 89); e, f, flowers from baskets.

preserved as in figures 22, g, h; 25; plate 35, b, d. In seeking the reason for its favor among artisans, an observation by Madenine Cesar answered the question. She said of the pond lily, "That is what the muskrat eats (wažackwē'de)." In native esteem this is a sufficiently cogent reason for the frequency of the yellow lily figure in decoration of storage containers intended for food and for other possessions. Do we need to be reminded of the hoarding habits of the rodentia to understand the curious force of symbolism habitual to the Algonkian

mind? And the *Nymphaea* is furthermore edible, not only to beaver and muskrat, but to the Indian himself who hunts the creatures for food and fur. Beneath the symbolism here is linked an association ever-present in the connectivity of nature. I mention the instance of the yellow pond-lily symbol in particular, since it affords an opportunity to connect again the art motivation of the Algonquin with an indigenous and locally characteristic object in the tribal environment. It is not, indeed, the French lily, introduced sporadically into the New World flora, which provides in this case the inspiration of art, nor is it



FIGURE 14.—Designs from sides of birchbark basket (River Desert Band) (NMC, III, L, 89).

a, Elaboration of cross and heart; *b*, flower (fern head?); *c*, arch, rainbow; *d*, flower.

the scented pond lily (*Castalia odorata*), in such favor among white people. The latter I have not as yet observed in the endroits of the reservation.

Among those who, as I recall it, have indicated preference for one or another type of design, Mæckusi'k-we (Mrs. Buckshot) expressed her preference for floral over animal figures in her work. I believe I had a similar impression of the taste of artisans in talking with other women.

A formalism in plant representation is strikingly exhibited in the series of slightly varied contours which show little regard for specific botanical features of the plants chosen for reproduction. The rule



FIGURE 15.—Birchbark cut-out patterns applied to surfaces of containers and baskets to outline decorative scraped-away designs. They represent flowers and plants, some general, some specific (River Desert Band) (MAI).

which holds in the majority of cases seems to be to cut-out patterns representing floral growths leaving a thick vertical center stalk surmounted by a bulbous head (equaling the blossom or fruit), with symmetrically placed ovals in pairs placed below to represent leaves

branching from the stalk. The base line is often broadened, sometimes a little domed, to represent the earth. (See the varied series in figs. 13, 15, 25.) Notwithstanding the prevailing disregard for botanic accuracy just mentioned, the makers of the patterns, both cut-out and bitten, confess to seeing in them the likenesses of plant forms which they can name. The muster of named identities given in response to questioning includes berries of every kind, hawberry, leaves of every sort, maple, "trees," white pine, spruce, balsam, elm and ash, and the favorite outlines of swamp vegetation, the pond lily and

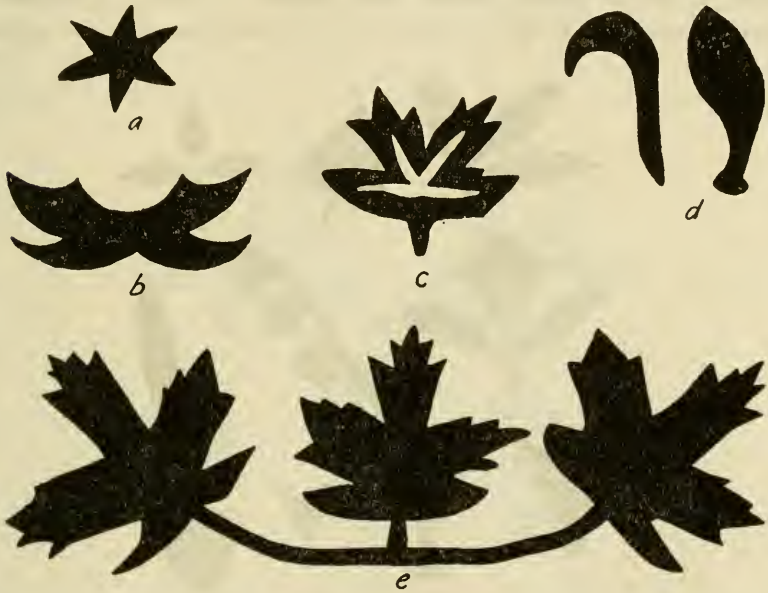


FIGURE 16.—Designs from birchbark vessels and baskets (Timiskaming and River Desert Bands).

a, Star, five in series on one side of basket (Timiskaming Band) (NMC, III, L, 102); *b*, band-curve design on cover of *c* (pl. 34 *c*) (III, L, 104); *c*, maple leaf, four in series on one side (III, L, 102); *d*, sprout of a plant and leaf (River Desert Band); *e*, maple-leaf cluster (Timiskaming Band) (III, L, 103).

pitcherplant occurring with the greatest frequency. One need not hesitate long in deciding what elements of environment engross the imagination of the simple people whose art we have here spread out before us.

The placing of the design figures on containers is manifestly a matter of individual taste among the artisans of the band. Certain of them show preference for an arrangement of smaller design units on the basket walls. Others show a tendency to place a larger composite and symmetrical plant figure on the long side-wall and add smaller units as taste dictates. In such cases they are interpreted as unrelated single objects in nature. Those who combine the unit patterns into

a synoptic whole, introducing both animals and plants into a scene which shows also some celestial phenomena, may be rated among the master designers of their community. Reference will be made to the feature of composition in the course of a few pages.

An observable characteristic of design location in the work of this group is the consciousness of need, in their esteem of beauty, to cover or disguise the "unsightliness" of seams. This is achieved by causing the decorative patterns to fall upon the seam spaces so that the stitches (in spruce-root material, of course) become the vertical center or midrib of an upright plant figure. The result makes the stitches and seams integrate into the decoration, becoming an adjunct



FIGURE 17.—Element designs from birchbark wall pocket (*a-e*), and birchbark cut-out patterns for decoration of containers (*f-j*) (River Desert Band) (MAI).

a, Leaves; *b*, blossom; *c*, little diamonds; *d*, blossom and leaves; *e*, wild cherries; *f*, leaf; *g*, *h*, blossoms; *i*, *j*, ornamental forms.

instead of a detriment. A glance through the illustrations will furnish evidence of this. We might recall that Wissler in a study of the art principles of the Plains Indians focused attention upon a similar esthetic persuasion in the art of the Sioux.

In the productions of the River Desert Algonquin the percentage of undecorated baskets and containers is relatively low. (See table of summary, p. 262.) This may be due to the more settled form of life of the band since the partial transformation of interest from hunting and trapping to farming began some 70 years ago. Proximity to whites has likewise to be considered. Specimens with undecorated sides but decorated lids are also in evidence. Lids or covers so orna-

mented usually show an arrangement of simple elements to form a whorl, the patterns being turned upon a center.

The treatment of designs in composition among Algonquin artisans also runs to landscape representation, resulting in a stylicism which approaches the first steps of pictography. This tendency may be expected for a people so closely approximating, historically and geographically, the cultural stature of the Ojibwa. The combination of animal and plant motives, with a smattering of celestial phenomena thrown in, comprises, in a certain proportion of the better decorated products, a panoramic display well suited to express the sylvan interests of such a people. On the sides of the larger baskets where space invites a display of ornamentation, animals in silhouette appear posed in portraiture in the varied staging of pond, marsh, and clusters



FIGURE 18.—Designs from sides of birchbark dishes (River Desert Band).

Elements of decoration representing flowers and blossoms (MAI, NMD, UPM).

of deciduous and evergreen growths, especially lilies (the cow lily, *Nymphaea advena*) and pitcherplants, with easily recognizable reality of form and of action. The panoramic totalities are appealing in meaning to the eyes of the Algonquin, depicting to him in visible form the vision of his sleeping and his waking moments—the Utopia of plenty for a hunting and trapping tribe. So it happens that landscapes of night as well as of day are laid out in composition on some of the containers. The distinguishing mark of night horizons is the presence of the star figure or the crescent moon above. The night scenes are strikingly realistic both in form and in concept, showing the familiarity of the artists with the activities of the wonderful animals chosen for portrayal—the bear, beaver, otter, deer. They stand out most vividly in the experience of the natives and seem to hold their place in the best achievements of their art. Without

indulging in further discussion of the qualities of the woodscapes, a selection of examples will suggest for themselves what they may mean to their forest-minded makers. (See pls. 30, *d, e, g*; 35, *a*; 36; 38; and figs. 10, 11.)

In the following tabulation the salient features of Algonquin technique and design are summed up to conform with the purpose of this article, that is, the presentation of material from specific tribes to serve as a basis for future interpretative study.

TABLE 1.—*Summary of characteristics of birchbark container construction and decoration of various bands of Algonquin and neighboring groups*

| Bands | Undecorated | Decorated | Exclusively animal figures | Animal and other figures | Human figures | Band floral designs | Rim reinforcement of birchbark | Etched design below rim | Painted decoration | Porcupine-quill decoration | Color scheme of rim wrapping | Geometrical figures | Simple flower elements exclusively |
|---|-------------|-----------|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------|
| Algonquin bands: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| River Desert: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | 20 | 26 | | | | 3 | 4 | 18 | | | | | |
| National Museum of Canada..... | 132 | 5 | | | | 3 | | 1 | | | | | |
| University Museum..... | 2 | 5 | | | 1 | | | 3 | | | | | |
| National Museum of Denmark..... | | 6 | | | | 6 | | | | | | | |
| River du Lièvre: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | 1 | 3 | | | | 3 | | | | | 1 | | |
| Mattawa: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| National Museum of Canada..... | | 3 | | | | 3 | | 3 | | | | | |
| Golden Lake: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | 5 | 7 | 1 | 3 | 1 | | 3 | | 1 | | | | |
| Timiskaming..... | 9 | 12 | 2 | 3 | | | | 5 | | | | | |
| Ojibwa bands: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Timagami: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| National Museum of Canada..... | 2 | 12 | | | | 2 | | 4 | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | | 3 | | 1 | | 2 | | | | | | | |
| Private collection..... | | 8 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | | | | | | | |
| Nipissing: ³ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | | 3 | | | | | | | 1 | 2 | | | |
| Depot Harbor: ⁴ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | 8 | | | | | | | | | (5) | | | |
| Long Lac: | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Museum of the American Indian..... | | 7 | | | | | | 1 | | | | 4 | 2 |
| Algonquin (1937): | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| River Desert: ⁶ | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Denver Art Museum (and private collection)..... | 10 | 35 | 0 | 7 | 26 | 24 | 2 | 14 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 9 |

¹ The large number of plain forms here is due, according to Mr. Leechman's information, to their being a gift to the museum of newly made specimens of bark peeled in the summer, which is not suited to etching.

² Origin doubtful, dated from about 1840. Quillwork vaguely remembered by informant (information, F. Johnson).

³ Collected by Dr. A. I. Hallowell, 1928.

⁴ Collected by Frederick Johnson, 1928.

⁵ Quantities of quill-decorated bark boxes are exported from this reserve to supply the trade. An enumeration of specimens of this type would not affect the problem, although quill decoration in early times evidently extended to this area.

⁶ See footnote, p. 233.

Although at the present time of writing, studies of the art content of birchbark containers of the northern Indians have not progressed far enough to permit comparisons to be made, nevertheless something can and probably should be said since the printing of the material on Montagnais art in birchbark work (Speck, 1937). A few remarks summarizing the characteristics of decorations of this group may be made from an angle of comparison derived from the sources already available.

Unlike the Montagnais, the Algonquin workers I have observed in the present generation do not create the patterns for their designs



FIGURE 19.—Design elements from birchbark water pail (River Desert Band)

a, "Toad's leggings," pitcherplant (*Sarracena purpurea*); *b*, *e*, leaves; *c*, heart; *d*, blossom of lily.

so much from folded sheets of thin birchbark indented by the teeth. The Montagnais derive many of their symmetrical patterns from these symmetrically unfolded impressions. The Algonquin depend more upon the cut-out figures trimmed with a knife or scissors in accordance with a visual image formed in the imagination or imitated from the observation of nature. (See p. 243.) Horizontal symmetry is produced by repeating the carving of the pattern to the right or to the left. Vertical symmetry (that is, where the design is repeated by turning the pattern up or down on its top or bottom) is not in evidence in the art of the bands dealt with here, so far as material warrants the statement. The cut-outs are both floral and animal. Floral suggestions are more in evidence among the eastern bands of

the group. Animal figures increase as one approaches the cultural strip nearer to the Ojibwa. I would infer from a general estimate of the evidence we possess that the animal figures are of prior dating to the floral motives. And that the latter are an acquisition, either having developed within the art horizon of the area as a natural outgrowth of internal stimuli or having resulted from imitation of other Indians or the French, is also highly probable. Knowledge of



FIGURE 20.—Birchbark cut-out patterns for decorating containers, representing flowers (River Desert Band).

the absence or presence of surface decorations on bark containers of related and adjacent groups is now the lacking element in the art history of the northern Algonquin.

To theorize, furthermore, upon the possible sources of origin here for the tree and flower designs would call for a play of imagination

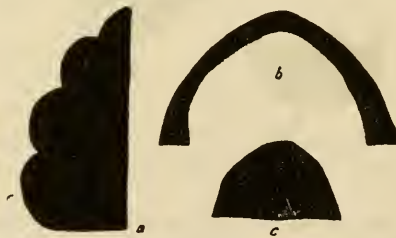


FIGURE 21.—Pattern stencils cut out of birchbark, used in decorating containers (River Desert Band).

a, Scallop for decorating center or corner of basket; *b*, arch or rainbow for side of basket; *c*, scallop element for decoration under rim of basket.

hardly permissible in a report of this character. One need not, however, feel obliged to conjure up the remote past in the life of these forest denizens to seek for pointed suggestions in their functioning experiences amid daily and constant environment which would lead to the adoption of floral, especially leaf, devices in ornamentation. It is a real experience in the retina of European as well as native eyes to witness the mottled shadows cast by the rays of the summer sun

through the canopy of the leafy crown of the forest thrown upon the flat surfaces of objects lying littered about the camps. The Indians themselves are not oblivious to the shadowed silhouettes in the ceaseless panorama of sun-strewn patterns. In their contemplations, such displays of beauty have upon occasion been noted and the impressions voiced in my presence. Yet the association of leaf silhouettes with the origin of bark surface decorations still remains only a possible, if not a futile, suggestion of explanation emanating from the reasoning habit of the student—an unprovable hypothesis until "nature pho-

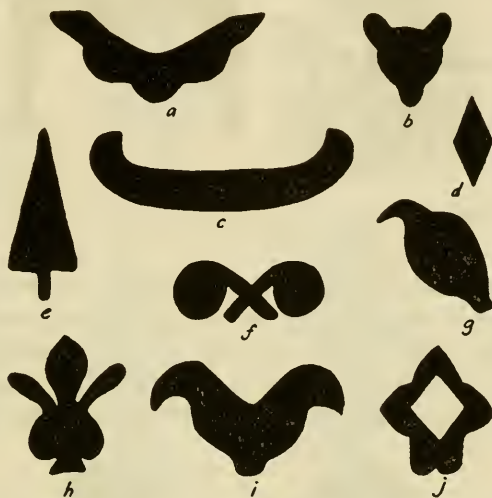


FIGURE 22.—Birchbark cut-out patterns for decorating containers, and designs taken from decorated objects (River Desert Band).

a, Arch (pattern for border design below rim); *b*, bear's head; *c*, canoe; *d*, diamond; *e*, tree (balsam); *f*, berries; *g*, pond lily; *h*, pond lily; *i*, *j*, flowers (unidentified).

tography" shall disclose itself as a functioning concept of art²⁴ in aboriginal Algonquin culture history, be it ancient or modern.

The modest array of designs from this band upon which judgment has to be formed, permits an observation; namely that the integral floral or the forest landscape, as conceived in native eyes, is a characteristic. This seems to accord with the economic eminence of the great environing forest and its animal denizens expressed in totality (as in fig. 12, *a*; pls. 30, *b*, *d*, *e*; 31, *b*, *c*, *f*, *g*; 34, *f*). And so pictographic art expresses here in symbols the ecology of a Canadian Algonkian group.

²⁴ Since the above was written I have examined the volume *Reflections*, by Mrs. Marian Thayer MacMillan (N. Y., 1936, p. 55), in which an interpretation of the "double curve" motif is proposed. The author of this remarkable hypothesis suggests derivation of the curve patterns of the northern Indians from native observations of plant reflections along the edge of still water. One cannot fail to be impressed by the author's logical views as supported by her text and illustrations.

The scenes are characteristically those of the food quest. In one, perhaps the highest flight of realistic genius of which these Indians are capable without instruction from the outside, we have the familiar and joyous event of late winter; the gathering of sugar-maple sap (fig. 10, *b*; pl. 30, *d*). This pictographic composition is reproduced from a spontaneously made water pail of bark, the seams pitched with



FIGURE 23.—Designs from one side and end of birchbark container (Mattawa Band) (NMC, III, L, 189).

spruce gum, in constant use in the family of Mikweni'n-i, "Willing Man." It stands for the idea which I have expressed with some persistence, that the forest dwellers of the "snowshoe hunting" culture possess a natural inclination toward an art tradition in decorating utensils in common use. Another theme construed in the style

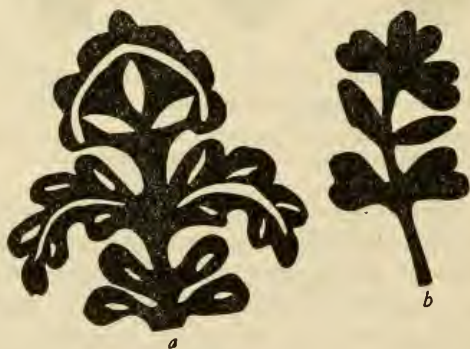


FIGURE 24.—Designs from birchbark containers (Mattawa Band).

a, Floral design in positive and negative technique (NMC, III, L, 189); *b*, floral design on side of small container (III, L, 191).

which may be called aboriginal so far as its conception and execution are concerned is the forest horizon in profile shown in figure 12, *d*. Two northern hares, their heads only showing above the hill, amid the tangle of a swamp, are portrayed realistically enough to excite interest in the eyes of hunters, whether natives or Europeans. Note also the dog chasing the partridge as a theme on a pail (fig. 10, *a*).

Similar judgment may be pronounced upon the bears symmetrically opposed under the arching tree in figure 11, *h*. The dominance of the feeling for symmetricism is here apparent in the composition of animal and tree silhouettes. Another conception of the forest night scene of vital meaning to these Indians is the representation of a goose on the lake shore, the crescent moon above, with the hunter's arrow on its way to its mark (pl. 36, *b*, cover of basket). Upon the sides of a cylindrical pail (pl. 31, *g*) are two graphic pictures, one an



FIGURE 25.—Assortment of plant-design elements from sides and covers of birchbark containers derived from cut-out patterns, mostly pseudorealistic representations of yellow pond lily (River Desert Band).

otter racing over the flats beneath the full moon, and, on the opposite side, two does at a stand facing each other beneath a drooping evergreen tree. Here again the symmetrical ruling of Algonquin composition has asserted itself. The otter scene just mentioned occurs twice on specimens collected from the River Desert Band. In plate 38 (upper figure) appears a duck represented advancing toward a blossoming pond lily. Above is a butterfly and a disk representing optionally the sun or the moon. The specimen is a sap pail. The

lid of a pattern holder made by a girl of about 12 years of age (Anne Clement), at Maniwaki, betrays what seems to rank as a work of more sophisticated skill, namely, a single pyramidally-formed balsam rising above a firmament of five stars and crescent moon (pl. 38, lower fig.). Algonquin realistic intention is evident throughout. The beaver in his nightly activity of feeding and storing is a favorite topic of thought and portrayal in the north. The subject appears occasionally in the work of this band, as in three instances observed (pls. 34 *f*; 33, *a*; 36, *a*). Its treatment is fairly simple yet falls into the holographic category. The partly gnawed stem of a plant or tree is shown before the animal climbing over rocks on the border of his pond (pl. 36, *a*). In plate 35, *a*, appears a most pleasing arrangement of outline and contrast in a composition obtained by Mr. Patman from Madenine Cesar. It is scraped upon a large storage box made to protect her clothing and personal effects from misplacement in her camp. The subject chosen by her was a loon in flight above a setting of lake shore as stamped upon the memory of its creator. I dare not indulge in comment upon the quality of this composition more than to stress its appeal as well as its adaptability to the aims of modern decorative art.

THE CONSCIOUS ELEMENTS OF ALGONQUIN DESIGN MOTIVATION

To what extent the creation of animal and plant designs among the workers investigated is the result of deliberate intention, arises as a question to be weighed by evidence both objective and, as far as possible, subjective. Responses to efforts through questioning of several of the more active workers in birchbark showed that in producing animal and plant figures by means of cutting out the imaginary silhouettes, a conscious effort is made in the direction of portrait realism. Familiarity with plant forms in a multitude of varieties is a characteristic of woman's life in these bands. The traditional knowledge of curative properties of herbs, barks, and roots marks their personalities. The same is true of their experience with animal life. Small wonder that these influences should dominate the realm of creative illustration. One who considers the general aspects of design motivation among the Canadian forest tribes should also consider the importance of plant and animal beings in the milieu of environment. The past era of cultural development has been an era immersed in the influences of the woods—the "bush," in the vernacular of the north. Camp life, camp food, desires, associations of wide variety, induce thoughts by day and dreams by night centered about the denizens of the dark forests, the shimmering lakes, the barren *brulés*, and the waving marshes. These environments harbor both blessings and haunting terrors. Their effect is deeply registered upon the imagination as

well as the daily-life horizon of the natives. An outgrowth of emotions determined by such influences resulting in productions of art form would seem to be inevitable.²⁵

Where, we may ask, might a subconscious motive in phytozomorphic representation be expected to appear in the art work of these groups? We might gain something by teaching ourselves to view the conditions with a freshness of outlook hitherto strange to ethnological trends of estimating the sources of native art inspiration. That there seems to be a suggestion of a hazy approach to subconscious rulings in the production of the *bitten designs* at least, is a point for consideration in an unbiased scrutiny of evidence. It requires an analysis of the purposes and practices of designing and of the feelings of the designers themselves for the outcome of their own habitual efforts. So far as the discussion of control factors in the making of the tooth-bitten decorative patterns has brought forth results, it may be said that the creators of these blind outlines do not profess to know just what patterns are to emerge from their teeth in most cases. There may be, indeed, a deliberate effort to mystify their art in the esteem of admirers when they profess to be moved by what we may consider as pure genius in discussing the matter. Yet there remains a shadow of accident in the production of bitten designs attributable by one so inclined to subconscious influences. To what extent the profoundly personal emotions, and experiences of natives who have alternately suffered and reveled in the bosom of the wilderness, affect the forms of patterns produced by the teeth with eyes often closed and imagination actively functioning, we may never learn. To admit such influences, however, one would have to be a witness to the process. And that is not possible for contestants of the surmise just expressed. On the other hand, it is not the intention here to insinuate a surrealist explanation of these instances of blind designing with the teeth. I should only add that those who are adept in the art of biting patterns, like Madenine Cesar, are widely known among their people and enjoy a reputation which could be rendered by our use of the term inspired. One would need to secure intimate personal histories of the few performers in the band. To obtain candid confessions from some of them by usual means would not be at all easy without courtship. The question raised in this paragraph is nevertheless fraught with interesting possibilities for investigation. I shall have to pass it on.

The question of religious symbolism in the designs discussed may arise as a possibility here. The matter was given some attention during the course of contact with the people. In no sense, however,

²⁵ Incidentally, and to lend emphasis to the question of origin so often approached by students of native art, it seems to be as plausible to regard these deep-seated stimuli as indigenous provocations of design motives in the woodlands as to pronounce them summarily to be derived from European promptings. To dispense with the deeper motives of nature representation in Woodland Indian art in favor of the European derivation theory has become almost a habit in certain circles of thought.

can Algonquin decoration be construed into being a conscious religious document as might be the case in groups socially more complicated.

CHRONOLOGY OF DESIGN

Confronting us constantly is the important question of the dating of decorations met with on these objects. It would be a most valuable addition to our knowledge of northern art history could we learn something from eighteenth century documents concerning the nature of basket designs of the area, or even as far back as a century ago. Here, as in the case of the Montagnais, however, early records have nothing sufficiently specific to say regarding birchbark wares and their decorations—topics too remote from the zeal-arousing subjects of soul salvation and education which engrossed the thoughts of missionary writers of the period.

For the contemporary art figures (flowers, leaves, animals, arch, etc.) there is nothing for us beyond native tradition of antiquity to pierce the haze of uncertainty surrounding the time and manner of their adoption and the sources from which they owe their derivation. Many of the River Desert specimens figured are modern, that is, made within the last 15 or 20 years. Some, however, have a known age of three generations (Petruccio, 1929, p. 227). Mrs. Buckshot, of River Desert, now in her seventies, the maker of a number of those illustrated, acquired her art from her mother without making any changes in the construction process or patterns of decoration of her bark work.

Knowing that the River Desert Indians prior to 1854 were resident at the Lake of Two Mountains Mission, and nearer by about 150 miles to the settlements on the St. Lawrence, we cannot evade the conclusion that European influence has been operating upon the esthetic development of these Indians. Indeed, the River du Lièvre Band shows such elaborate composition of its birchbark decorative figures, that the effect of French-Canadian farm life is only too apparent in the representations of flower pots and even bouquet groupings. The main difficulty is where to discriminate between native motives in the ornamentation of these old bark pails and the attempt to imitate European designs. While the critic may possess grounds for his own opinion on the question, it is evident that more material and especially more historical data will have to be obtained before the argument lurking beneath the surface will have been closed. It is apparent nevertheless, from what we know of the age, the economic character of the bark containers, and their decorations among these bands, that the craft they now represent dates back to the beginnings of the last century.

There is, however, another aspect of recent history of the basketry problem involved in the art craftsmanship of the River Desert Algon-

quin, if not that of the other bands as well. Among the older decorative techniques of this and the River du Lièvre Band we meet with an art process having deep significance in the understanding of distribution problems, namely the ornamentation of the splints of checkerwork baskets by applying stamp designs to the broad splints by means of cut-out "pattern blocks" made of potato, turnip, or wood. Discussion of this form of art is a topic in itself, for the outline of which we may await the results of a study by Miss Gladys Tantaquidgeon. The provenience of the "block" printing basket ornamentation carries us to the consideration of art over a wide area extending from the Delaware, Munsee, and Mahican of the middle Atlantic region across southern New England, Mohegan, Pequot, and Nehantic, and then, after a break in distribution presented by the Iroquois,²⁶ who do not stamp or paint patterns on their baskets, back to the upper St. Lawrence where the process appears again among the Algonquin. The interruption in distribution of this remarkable decorative technique, caused by its nonoccurrence among the Iroquois wedged between the two areas where it flourished, is, to my mind, tacit evidence that it belongs to a period of art evolution among eastern Algonkian-speaking tribes when they occupied an extent of territory in common, at a time prior to their dispersion northward and eastward through penetration of the Iroquois into their domain. Block stamping in basket ornamentation is, therefore, probably an extremely early native development among the eastern Algonkian peoples, and one which by some trend of migration was diffused northward to the later Algonquin proper. This has by now become blended with the primitive and natural decorative processes of a northern provenience, i. e., birchbark etching. It is, however, only with the latter that the present paper attempts to deal.

A consideration to be included in our examination of Algonquin art is the knowledge that the making of birchbark baskets has witnessed both a decline and an expansion within the last two generations. The use of such articles in the band fell off to its lowest level in about the last decade of the nineteenth century. Introduction of industry into the forest sections of Quebec caused a withdrawal of the Indians lying near the centers of industrial activity, luring them from exclusive hunting and trapping to pursuits of labor in the construction camps. The River Desert Band was one of those deeply affected by the change. Then came a feeble renewal of demand for the more esthetic forms of Indian labor. The women, on their part, found occupation in dull times and in winter in making birchbark and splint baskets for the more appreciative element of the incoming whites—the families of

²⁶ Exceptions may be noted in the case of the Iroquois Oneida and Mohawk, who have produced these forms corresponding in design and technique to those of the adjacent Algonkian, from whom I believe they were acquired.

officers and staffs of the huge corporations. Contact with this class of Europeans had its results. The Indian of the "bush" encountered gentler white people at last who admired some of his gifts and accomplishments, and liked them. The discovery on the part of the latter that Indians could do something more than chop, drive, paddle, cook, sweat, and freeze in the "shanties" of the lumber and pulp operations created a spark of interest in the "inferiors." The discovery of native arts of delicate form, skillful technique and tasteful ornamentation, of the symbolic language of picture writing in the alphabet of beasts, flowers, and trees, brought out something that both races could understand. The Indians slowly responded to the new demand put upon their abilities. This time they drew upon a form of production which appealed to their woods-loving nature. And so, while it is true and should be emphasized that indigenous arts and crafts both useful and beautiful never completely ceased, there has been a revival. Native groups in other parts of the country have passed through similar transitions in the rise and fall of their folk-crafts. In the case of the Algonquin another generation will write the answer to the question of ultimate survival or extinction of a promising art inspiration born somewhere in the birch-forest depths of the circumboreal area.

Interest in the construction and decoration of bark containers is aroused by the position they hold in the history and evolution of invention from the world point of view. Containers for dry and for liquid properties may be thought of as extremely early products of invention beginning with animal skin (rawhide) and tree skin (bark) folded wrappers and troughs of the simplest forms, some of which survive in use among hunting nomads of recent times. How can it be doubted that these products antedate in time and precede in technology the lengthy series of containers and holders which appear evolved through boxes, basketry, and bags in manifold form from the simplest to most complex forms often within the same areas? The porcupine-quill decorative technique on birchbark containers characteristic of the area among the Algonkian of the Great Lakes region, where it has reached such an efflorescent stage, has developed, as I conceive it, from the incised floral decoration on birchbark discussed in this and in related themes of treatment.

It seems a proper time for a more critical, even reformistic attitude to be taken toward treatment of historical as well as functional aspects of native American art.

In a recent paper on Montagnais art in birchbark (Speck, 1937) I have evaluated certain evidence as set forth by commentators to prove European derivation of the floral and curve motifs so characteristic of design styles of Algonkian peoples of the Northeast. To many ethnologists this deduction may seem right in a superficial sense. In a profound sense, however, such an assumption in the guise

of a conclusion is a delusive one. Yet it has swayed the arguments propounded in treatises which constitute in most instances secondary sources. The review and analysis arranged in the discussions just concluded should mean something in the future understanding of what these nature associations (flora, fauna, and hunter's visions of landscapes) stand for among groups culturally environed in the ecological set-up of the Canadian life zone. To stress social factors of art culture, thereby thrusting aside a realization of what force is exerted by environmental conditions of nature, I am sure is to betray obstinate disregard for a great functioning influence. To drag in and stand up the historical art dummy of modern European origin in this case is subserving a sickly and overworked tradition of nineteenth century American ethnology. Someone may yet desire to attribute the pattern-biting process to as mythical a source as the old woman who bit holes in Swiss cheese with her one tooth, or perhaps to trace the Algonquin method of fashioning thongs from a single moose hide by spiral-centripetal trimming to Dido and the classical cutting of the bull hide! The material discussed in my several recent papers may at least inaugurate a contest of opinion with new bearings upon a subject of art which some of our profession have regarded as closed.

It would seem, furthermore, that these nations of the woods had already started a few steps along the way leading to the formation of a crude scriptural system, at least as far as pictorial representation of object and idea might so be regarded. The symbols having values of floral glyphs, partially developed into curve ideograms, passed into use as fixed outline forms. Their wide range of significance pictorially embraces those most important elements of life and environment. They rise in the scale of literate culture traits, even to the extent of being carved upon the faces of blocks employed as stamps, whence they acquire the character of block designs constituting a process of elementary printing with a color (ink) medium. If it seems presumptuous to lift these developments to such a high cultural rating in favor of a crude civilization, how may they be otherwise described? I shall take occasion subsequently to show in another paper how the block printing of designs was effected in the decorative art composition of other Algonkian groups of the Northeast (Munsee, Delaware, Mahikan, and the early southern New England peoples), a distribution which points toward a locus of specialization in art history that may be said to own some conventionalized type-forms for representation of ideas. May we not then boldly but justly call it an initial step on the part of Algonkian hunters in the production of an elementary system of writing and block printing amid an environment of uncleared forests?

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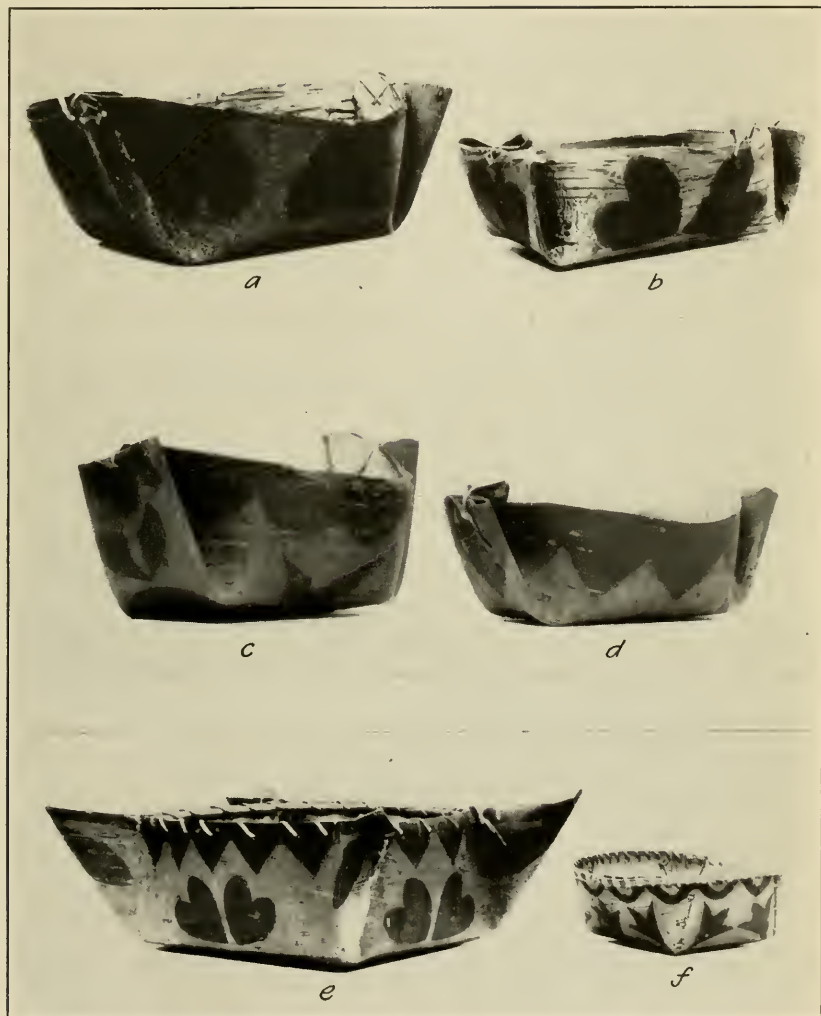
BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS. SAP BUCKET AND ROUND PAIL (RIVER DESERT BAND) (NMC).

a, b, c, Containers with similar designs on both sides; *d, e*, opposite sides of same bucket, scene of activity in sugarbush (MAI, 11×12 in.); *f*, birchbark pail for maple sap or water (River Desert Band), 13½ in. Designs represent "frog's leggings," pitcherplant (*Sarracena purpurea*), and leaves (MAI, 15/3068); *g*, round pail for household possessions, tools, work material, etc. (height 12 in.). Designs depicting night scene in woods, deer under tree.



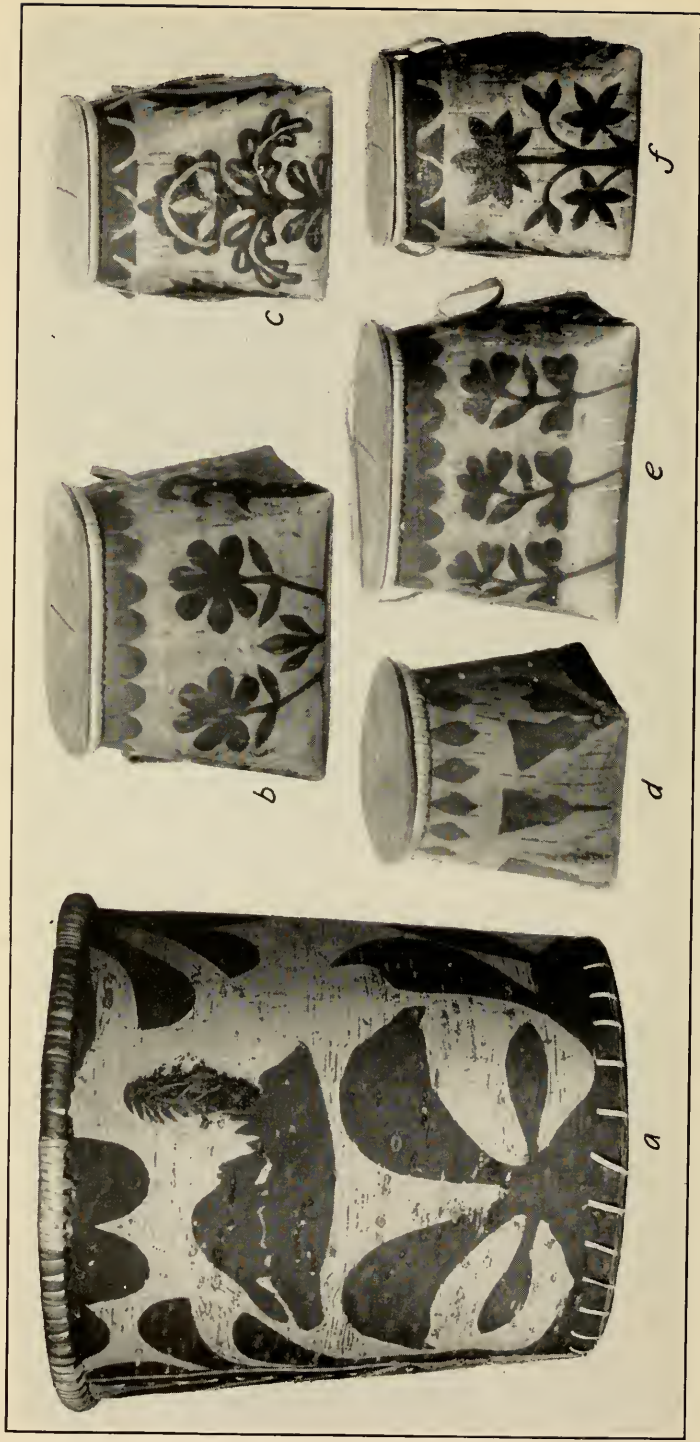
BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS (RIVER DESERT BAND).

a, Workbox, 8×10 in. (both sides are the same) (MAI); *b*, *c*, maple sap pail (Rochester Municipal Mus.); *d*, water or sap pail, height 11 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (MAI, 16/1595); *e*, water or sap pail, height 10 in. (MAI, 16/1596). Both have seams closed with pitch.



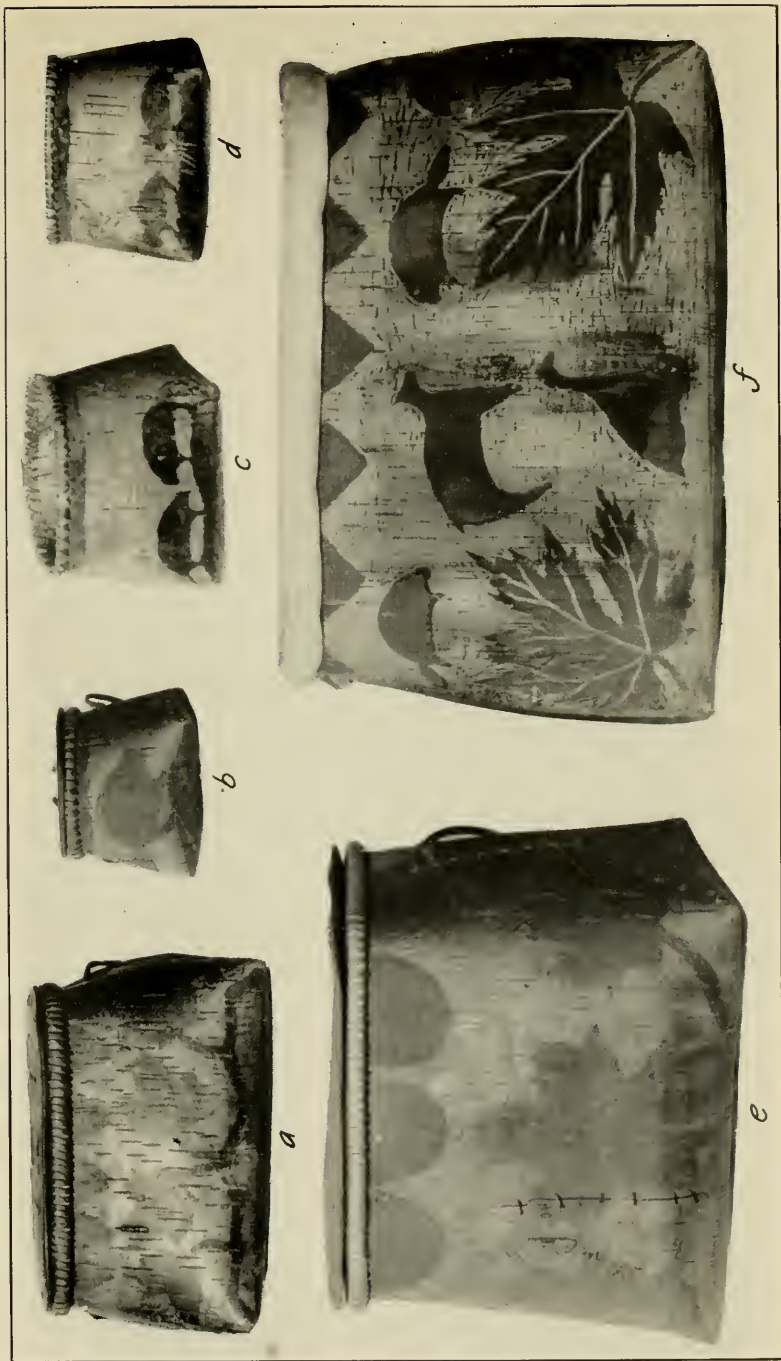
BIRCHBARK SAP PAILS AND DISHES (RIVER DESERT BAND).

a, b, c, d, Sap pails, height $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (MAJ, 16/1613-16/1616); *e*, large sap container, height $5\frac{1}{2}$ in. (16/1612); *f*, dish, height 3 in. (16/1597).



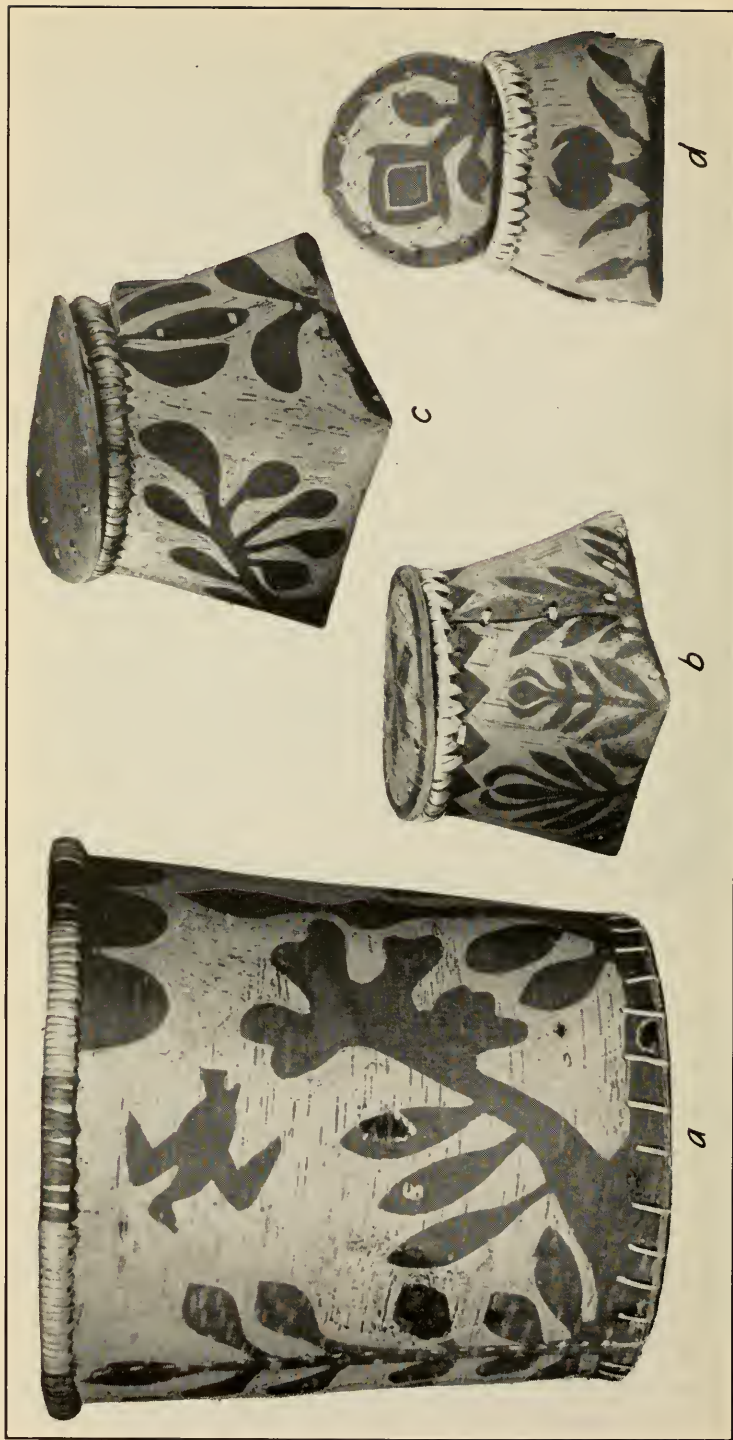
BIRCHBARK TRUNK AND BASKETS.

a, Algonquin birchbark storage trunk, sewed with spruce roots (18×18 inches). River Desert Band (DAM, CAI-2-P). (Photograph by W. m. F. Patman. Collected by F. G. Speck.) *b-f*, Birchbark baskets (Mattawa Band). *b, e*, Two sides of same specimen; *c, f*, two sides of same specimen (NMC, III, L, 189, 190, 191).



DECORATED BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS (TIMISKAMING BAND, ALGONQUIN).

a-f, NMC, III, L, 100, 102-4, 108.



ALGONQUIN BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS (RIVER DESERT BAND). (DAM, CAI-2-P).

a, Large storage container (18×18 in.), scene of lake shore with loon in flight; *b*, *c*, *d*, containers showing swamp scenes with lily growths. (Photographs by Wm. F. Patman.)



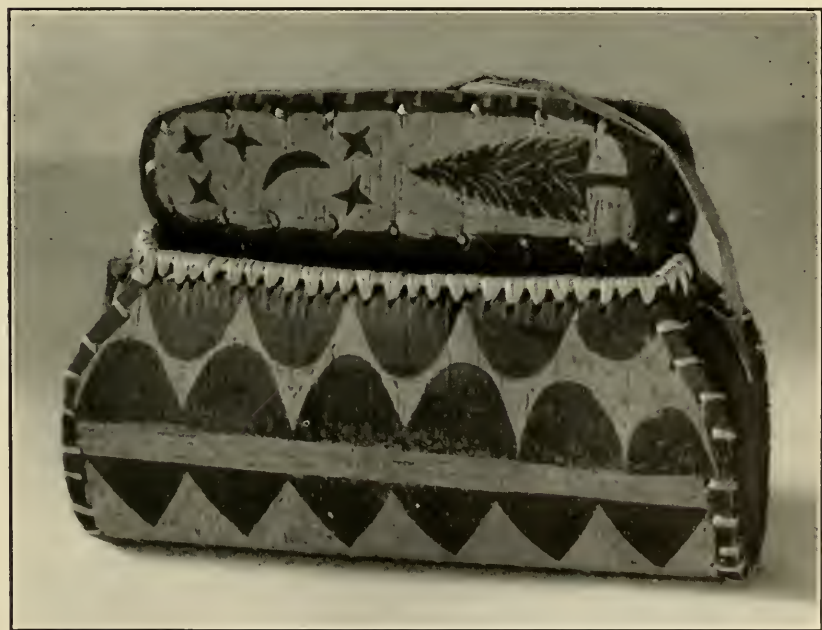
ALGONQUIN BIRCHBARK BOX WITH SCENE OF BEAVER GNAWING VEGETATION, BAND FLORAL DESIGN ON SIDES AND DUCK BEING SHOT WITH ARROW AT NIGHT; BOTH SIDES OF SPECIMEN (HEIGHT 5 IN.).

(DAM, CAI-2-P.) (Photograph by Wm. F. Patman.)



ALGONQUIN BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS FOR HOUSEHOLD ARTICLES WITH FLORAL FIGURES IN SGRAFFITO DESIGNING AND WITH SEWED-ON CUT-OUT PATTERN DECORATIONS.

Both sides of two vessels shown (6×6 in.) (DAM, CAI-II-P). (Photograph by Wm. F. Patman.)



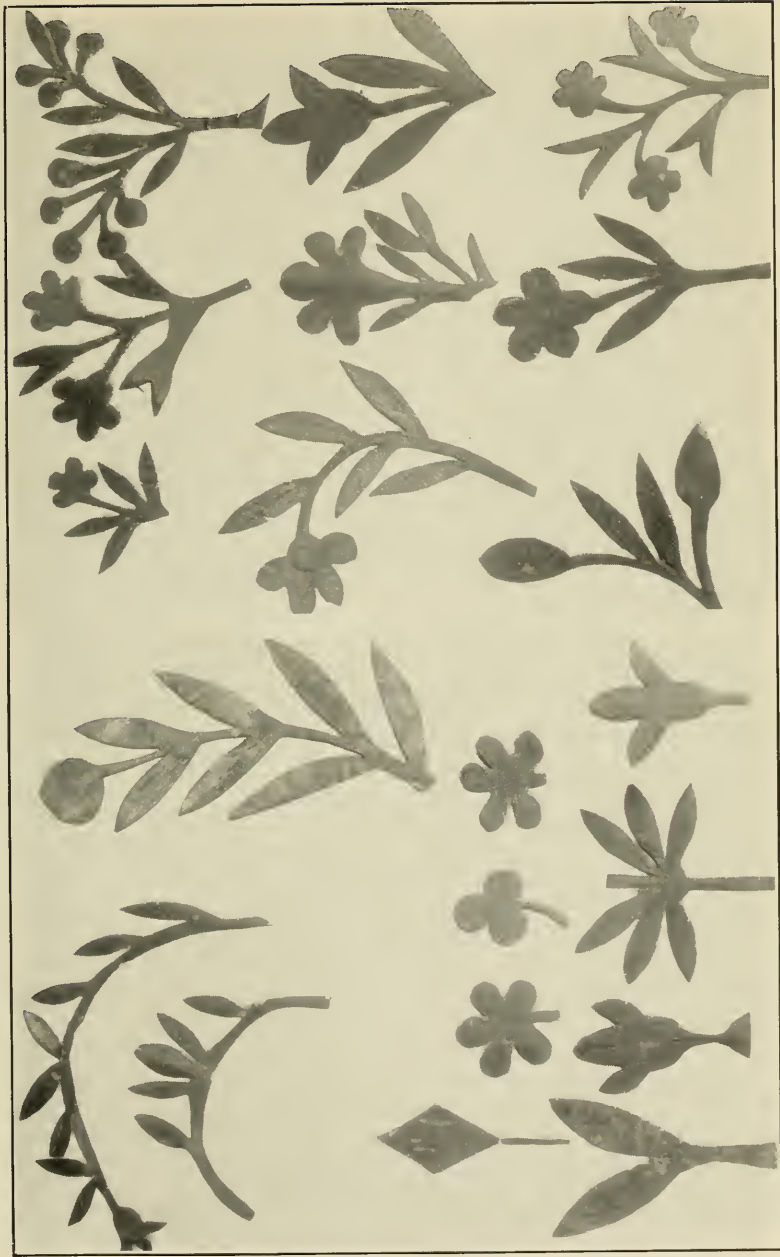
BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS (RIVER DESERT BAND).

Upper, decorated containers, night scene, duck, moth, or butterfly and moon on edge of lake; *lower*, decorated container for woman's possessions, sewing materials, cut-out and bitten patterns, with forest night scene on lid (10 in.) (DAM, CAI-14-P).



BIRCHBARK CONTAINERS.

- a*, Birchbark envelope container for bear bait, with pitcher-plant figure, $9\frac{1}{2} \times 11$ in. (River Desert Algonquin, P. Q.) (DAM⁺CAI-16-P).
- b*, Birchbark container with spruce-root loops for decoration on rim, $5\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (River Desert Band) (DAM, CAI-12-P).



BIRCHBARK CUT-OUT PATTERN MARKERS FOR DECORATING BARK CONTAINERS REPRESENTING UNDEFINED VARIETIES OF FLOWERS AND LEAVES (RIVER DESERT BAND) (MAI).



CAMP OF ALGONQUIN BIRCHBARK WORKER AND BASKET MAKER (MADENINE CESAR) (RIVER DESERT BAND, P. Q.).



MÁCKUSI'K'WE. "BEAVER MEADOW WOMAN." (MRS. M. BUCKSHOT) WITH DECORATED BIRCHBARK BABY CARRIER FOR INFANT UP TO ONE MONTH OF AGE. (SPECIMEN IN NMD, 1938.)