

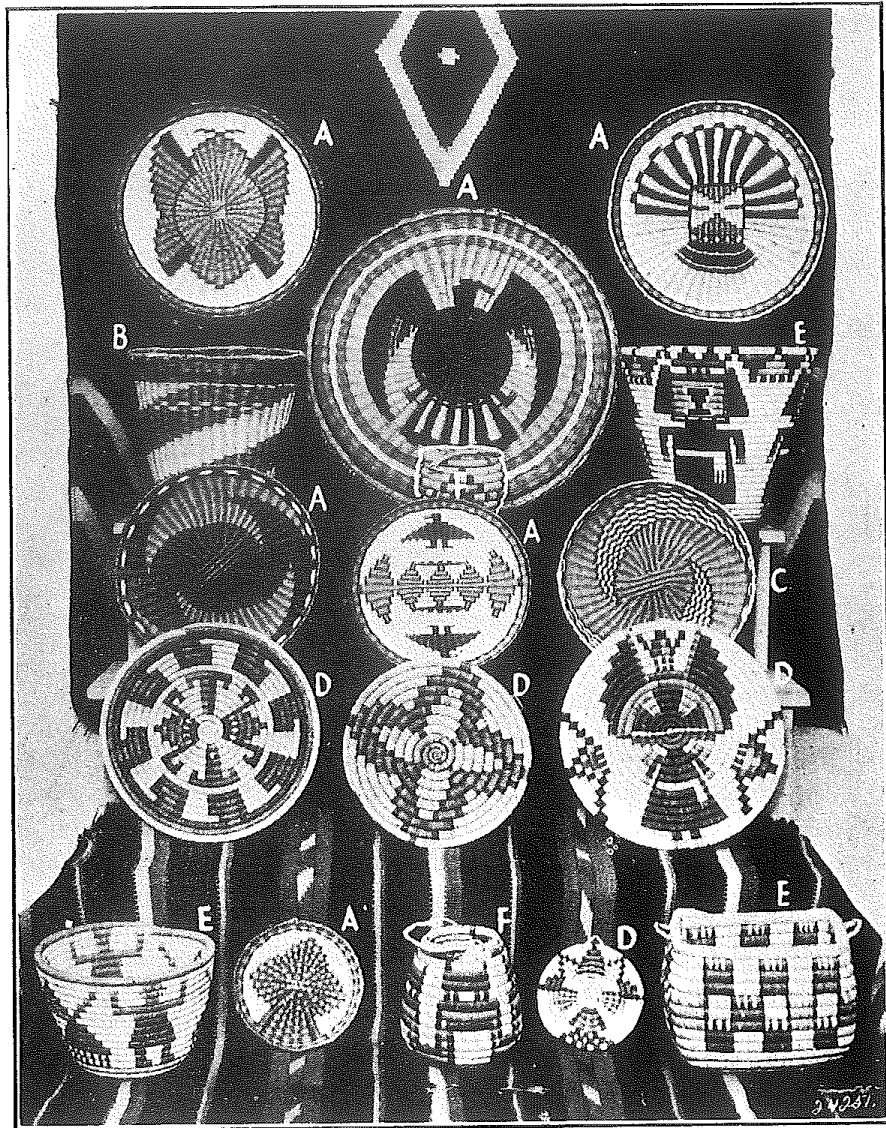
DENVER ART MUSEUM

1300 LOGAN STREET DENVER 3, COLORADO

Department of Indian Art

WILLENA D. CARTWRIGHT, CURATOR

FREDERIC H. DOUGLAS, EDITOR



HOPI COILED AND WICKER BASKETRY

Leaflet No. 17

1931

4th Printing, July, 1951

HOPI INDIAN BASKETRY

LOCATION. The Hopi Indians are a tribe of sedentary, agricultural people of Shoshonean stock, numbering about 3,000 and living in ten villages or pueblos in north central Arizona. For further details see Leaflets 4, 8, 9, 13 and 17.

HISTORY. Hopi basketry of today has undoubtedly descended from that practised by the prehistoric pueblo people, as specimens of all weaves have been found in excavated ruins. But no specimens can be seen in museums which were collected earlier than the latter half of the last century. The art degenerated with the coming of aniline dyes in the eighties. But beginning with the split in the Hopi tribe, which ended in the founding of the village of Hotevila, there began a revival of the native dyes. The conservatives who left the main body of the tribe to go to Hotevila refused to buy the aniline dyes and began making the old native colors. This revival, beginning in the very early years of this century, has since been carried on very successfully under the influence of lovers of Indian crafts, and of traders who have refused to buy anything but high class work. At present about 300 Hopi women are basket makers, young and old alike turning out baskets fine in quality of weave, color and design. The vast majority of this output is made for sale. Thousands of dollars come to the Hopi from this source.

WICKER BASKETRY

ORIGIN. Wicker baskets are made only on the third or west mesa and especially at Oraibi. Wicker basketry is not common among the American Indians. Hopi work of this kind is called the finest and most artistic in the world.

MATERIALS. Wicker basketry has a number of warp-ribs radiating from a central hub, and a weft consisting of lighter material woven in and out of the ribs in concentric circles. The ribs are made of sumac or willow twigs and the weft from the stems of three varieties of rabbit-brush, *Bigelovia Graveolens*, *Chrysothamnus Graveolens* and *Verbesnia Encelioides*. The edge is wrapped with strips of yucca leaf.

TECHNIC. The maker arranges two lots of sumac or willow twigs, each lot containing from two to thirteen or possibly more groups of from one to four twigs, which are somewhat longer than the diameter of the basket to be made. The groups of twigs making up each lot are bound together at the center into a flat mass with rabbit-brush stems passing over and under each group of twigs or sometimes completely around the lot. When sections of from 1 to 5 inches have been thus bound the two flat masses of parallel twigs are laid together at right angles and are fastened to each other at the corners of the bound sections with rabbit-brush stems. The edges are not bound together, so that it is usually possible to pass a thin blade between the two groups. After the center is started in this manner the radiating groups of twigs are arranged like the spokes of a wheel and the space between them is filled up by weaving rabbit-brush stems over and under them in concentric circles. As the weaving in of the rabbit-brush progresses additional radiating twigs are inserted so that a basket will have many more spokes at the rim than in the center. When the desired circumference has been reached the projecting ends of the ribs are bent sideways and are tied together with strips of yucca leaf. The basket resembles a circular spiderweb, except that the lines connecting the ribs are very close together.

TOOLS. A knife or scissors to cut the stems to the required length is often used. No other tool is necessary.

SHAPES. Flat or slightly curved plaques from 4 to 36 inches across (A), used for food and sacred meal trays and in any case where a plate-like object is needed. The plaques are very generally slightly concave with a low hump in the center. Waste baskets (B) with straight or flaring sides, from 6 to 18 inches deep. These were probably once small storage baskets, but are now made exclusively for sale. Shallow bowls (C) of various sizes. This is apparently a rather new shape.

COLORS. Black—sunflower seed, navy bean, soot, coal, ink of resin and iron alum. Blue—indigo, navy bean, larkspur flowers, sunflower seed shells. Red-brown—roots or whole plant of se-e-ta, iron ochre, alder bark, sumac berries, cockscomb flowers, thelesperma. Yellow—rabbit-brush flowers, sunflowers, ochre. Orange-yellow—saffron flowers. Green—se-e-ta stems, navy bean, copper carbonate. Brown—se-e-ta blossoms, navy bean, iron ochre. White—kaolin or limestone. Pink, cerise, purple, carmine, and violet—cockscomb flowers. Many additional shades are made by combining and treating these materials in different ways.

DYEING. Colors are applied to wicker baskets both before and after weaving. In the latter case it appears that mineral colors are used. These are ground to powder, mixed with saliva and the juice of chewed melon seed and painted on with a tuft of rabbit fur. If the dyes are applied first the peeled and smoothed stems are boiled in the dye and are placed when still wet on a rack placed over a fire. A blanket is held over this rack and raw wool is burned. The smoke of this rises through the wet twigs and sets the dye.

DESIGNS. Hopi basket designs are all based on life forms and the inspiration of many can be seen, but in other cases conventionalization has been carried to such extremes that the design units can only be considered as geometrical figures. Birds, parts of birds, butterflies, kachinas, either whole or the heads only, clouds, rainbows, sun and stars, whirlwinds of many types, antelope, snakes and geometric conventionalizations of the foregoing are the common designs on wicker basketry. Endless combinations of these elements are produced. The designs are not drawn out before the work begins, but are visualized in the maker's mind and carried out from memory. The counting of stitches guides the worker.

COILED BASKETRY

ORIGIN. Coiled basketry is made in the three villages of the second or middle mesa. In type of coil, shape and design these baskets very closely resemble those made in North Africa.

MATERIALS. The coils are made of strips of yucca leaf wrapped around bunches of a coarse grass, *Hilaria Jamesii*.

TECHNIC. A slender coil is begun by wrapping a long strip of yucca leaf about a small bunch of shredded bits of the same material. This coil is rolled on itself and sewed in position with yucca leaf. In making a flat plaque the inside faces the worker, and the outside if the shape is a deep one. The sewing is done by making a hole near the top of the already wrapped coil with an awl of bone or steel, passing a strip of yucca through this hole, around the foundation material projecting from the coil so far finished, and back to the next hole. Each stitch is pulled tight when made and firmly binds the new coil to the upper strands of the finished one. The maker starts increasing the size of the coil almost

at once and at the third or fourth turn she begins introducing the *Hilaria* grass. The diminishing of the coil occurs again on its last turn. In the older baskets some of the grass was left sticking out at the end of the final coil. The coils are nearly round, remarkably uniform and average about three-quarters of an inch in thickness, though both larger and smaller coils are often made.

SHAPES AND USES. Perfectly flat plaques (D) from 4 to 16 inches across, are used for food trays. Deep waste baskets (E) of many shapes and sizes are made for sale. Small globular baskets (F) with covers were probably made for seed storage. Coiled basket jars of very large size, five feet or more high, have been made on the special order of Americans. In 1872 wide brimmed hats were made with very fine coiling, but proved too heavy for use.

COLORS in coiled baskets are much less brilliant and varied than in the wicker. Black, yellow, red-brown, orange and several shades of green are usually seen. All but the greens are made from the dyes described under wicker basketry. The greens come from different parts of the yucca plant and are not dyed.

DYEING is done by boiling the yucca strips in the color, which is set with smoke, as described above.

DESIGNS are made up from the elements mentioned above. The designs are in general less complicated than on wicker. Kachina figures seem to be more common than on wicker and bird forms less so. For a discussion of design see Vol. 54, Proceedings of the U. S. National Museum, pp. 268-270.

TWILLED BASKETRY. This type of basketry is not made much in Hopi towns. Rather crudely shaped bowls in checkerboard or diamond twilled work are used for work baskets. The ends of the fibres are bent over and sewed around a hoop of wood, which forms the rim of the basket. Square shapes, bottles, head rings and pottery rests, forehead bands, belt weaver harness and cradle head bows are all made to some extent in this style of basket making. The material is always yucca. This type of work was common to all the Hopi villages. It is also much made in the eastern pueblos.

MATTING. Mats were formerly made by the Hopi in considerable quantities, but at present only two types are made. The first is made from straight rods held together by twined weaving with a few strands of yarn. This is used to wrap the bride's costume. The second type is made from yucca in checked or twilled weaving and serves for a hood over the fireplace. It is plastered with clay.

FINE COILED BASKETRY. Much of this work was found among the Hopi by the early American explorers and was supposed by them to be Hopi work. But it is now known that these pieces are Apache, Pima and Paiute baskets which had come into the possession of the Hopi.

Compiled from the following sources by Jean Allard Jeancon and F. H. Douglas:

UNITED STATES NATIONAL MUSEUM

Proceedings, Vol. 54, pp. 235-297. The Hopi Indian Collections in the United States National Museum—Hough.

Annual Report 1902. Aboriginal American Basketry—Mason.

Annual Report 1884. Basketwork of the North American Aborigines—Mason.

MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA

Museum Notes, Vol. 3, No. 1. The Hopi Craftsman.

Manuscript on Hopi Basket Dyes.

Manuscript from Lorenzo Hubbell, Oraibi, Arizona.