Native Basket Styles Return

BY RODDY MOORE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY TEJAH YATES

THOUGH IOWA HAYNES NEVER VENTURED FAR FROM HER ROOTS IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA, SHE MADE BASKETS REMARKABLY SIMILAR TO THOSE WOVEN DECADES EARLIER BY THE NATIVE ALGONQUIN PEOPLE OF NEW ENGLAND. THE AUTHOR SPENT YEARS TRYING TO IDENTIFY HER AND WHAT INSPIRED HER WORK.



This market basket is slightly rectangular (11.5 inches high by 12 inches long by 10 inches wide) with a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing on the rim. Dots, circles, circles made of dots, Xs, .25-inch circles, and "green apple cores" are rendered in green, black, red, and yellow paint.



A NUMBER OF years ago, I was at an auction on the eastern slopes of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Virginia, on the county line between Floyd County and Patrick County. In the estate that was being auctioned there were two baskets that appeared to be Northeastern "potato stamp" baskets—not something often seen in rural areas of Virginia.

I was familiar with the Algonquin potato baskets made in the 19th Century from the time I had spent living in Cooperstown, New York, where a good friend and classmate, Jack Erikson, would point them out

RIGHT This diminutive basket is in rough condition—the ash splints are very brittle, the single notch handle was broken and mended with a piece of metal, and it has an overall coat of shellac to protect the paint. The rim has ash cross-lashing. Hatching, circles, dots, and asterisk-like forms are painted in green, red, and black. It measures 8 inches high by 8.5 inches long by 6.5 inches wide.



OPPOSITE Iowa Haynes made her baskets from local ash trees pounded into splints, and all date to the first half of the 20th Century. Rather than natural dyes made from plant materials, she used commercially available paints. Many of her decorations mimic designs on Native American Algonquin baskets from decades earlier. This example has a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing on the rim. Designs of hatching, cross-hatching, and Xs are painted in green, black, yellow, and red. There is some fading due to age. The basket measures 12 inches high by 12 inches long by 9.5 inches wide.



Another market basket with a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing on rim has hatching, dots, circles, and Xs in red, green, black, and yellow. It measures 12.5 inches high by 13 inches long by 10 inches wide.

whenever we saw them while looking for antiques. Those baskets were commonly found in the region around Cooperstown.

Therefore, when I saw the two baskets in the auction, I thought that they must have been brought to the area from the Northeast. As I carefully examined them, I realized the materials and construction details did match the traditional methods used by Algonquin basket makers. I decided that my first impression had been correct and they must have been brought to the area somehow.

However, since that time more than forty years ago, I have seen more than thirty similar baskets that were found within Floyd County or its close surroundings. I gradually realized that since so many had shown up there that the idea that they had been brought there no longer made sense.

I next considered whether a maker from the Northeast had migrated to the region. But when I discussed the baskets with collectors who owned them, they considered them to be locally made despite their significant differences from traditional baskets from the region. Locally made baskets were almost always egg baskets or buttocks baskets, made with very narrow oak splints.

Several years later, while visiting with a local Floyd County historian, Marguerite Tise, I noticed one of the baskets of the kind I had been researching on her mantel. When I asked her what she knew about it, she said that she had owned it since 1921. Her father, Reverend Jacob Tise, had taken her and her two sisters to visit



On this market basket, the maker used red, green, and yellow paint to form floral complexes, circles, and squares as well as dots and hatching. Also with a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing, it measures 12 inches high by 12 inches long by 9.5 wide.

with a local woman, Iowa Griffith, to purchase a basket for each of his daughters.

Finally, I had an answer to the question "Who was the maker of the Floyd County baskets?" Because I was involved in another research project at the time, I filed away this new information to pursue in the future.

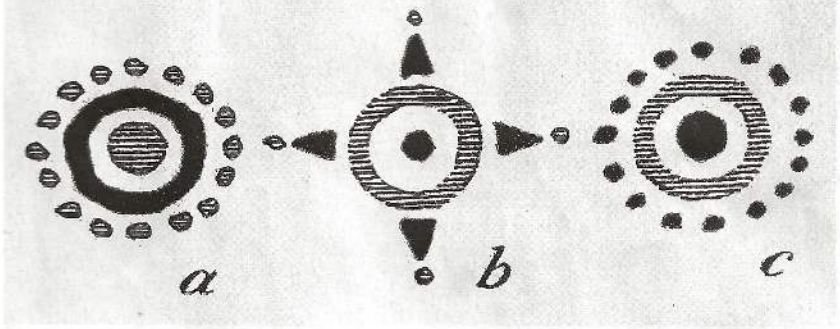
Then in 2018, the Old Church Gallery (see sidebar) in the town of Floyd presented an exhibit on basket makers of Floyd County titled *What Do We Need to Carry?* One of the basket makers documented was Iowa Griffith Cockram Haynes (1869–1964) who grew up in a family of ten children in Griffith Valley of Patrick County, adjacent to Floyd County. According to local history, her father was a chair maker, and his five daughters might have helped in weaving the seats for the chairs he made.

Iowa married twice but outlived both of her husbands. Her first husband was a Civil War veteran, and her second went blind before he died. She had no children of her own but helped her brothers and sisters raise their children. In addition to making baskets, she was known for her ability as a seamstress, making baby clothes, wedding dresses, and burial clothes. I learned from several of the people I interviewed that she was known to have been making baskets by the 1920s.

A neighbor, Lucille Nolen, remembered how Iowa made baskets, and on May 11, 2011, she gave this description of the process to Alice Slusher at the Old Church Gallery: "After an ash tree was cut down it was sawed into certain lengths and then split into long strips about 1-inch wide for baskets. They were then taken out and placed on a big chopping block. She would hold one end and beat the strips with a wooden mallet, and the splints would just separate. Mrs. Haynes always had on an apron and an old rag on her lap. She would then take a piece of glass and scrape the splints until they were slick. Then she was ready to make a basket. After making the basket she would paint a design on it. It was amazing to see how she painted her designs. She would cut a stick about as long as a finger so she could handle it easily. She would work it until it frayed and make it like a brush. She put her paint in a zinc can lid. She made all sized baskets, small to half bushels, and her floor would be sitting full of baskets she already made."



A market basket with a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing on the rim is decorated with hatching, asterisk-like forms, and circles with Xs and dots in green, black, and red. There is some fading to the red paint. The circle with decoration inside is one of the suggested designs in *The Decorative Art of Indian Tribes of Connecticut* booklet (below). The baskets measures 11 inches high by 11.5 inches long by 9.5 inches wide.



(Though this description does not exactly follow a complete set of the steps involved, it's a memory Nolen had at least forty years after watching Iowa make baskets.)

I then interviewed Wesley Shirley Duncan, a great-niece of Iowa's, and she described Iowa's process of basket making including the same details Nolen had remembered. So I had two descriptions of Iowa's basket making, and had seen many examples of her work, but I had no idea how this

OLD CHURCH GALLERY

Sparked by an appreciation of the creativity of past generations, the Old Church Gallery opened in 1978 in Floyd, Virginia, and has been preserving the heritage of Floyd County ever since. Its programs explore and document the creative ties that are woven throughout the community.

Colorful threads link generations of families in Gallery interpretive exhibits, art displays, oral history programs, and local history presentations. The permanent collection features handmade quilts, coverlets, baskets, crafts, and the stories to go with them.

The Gallery gained national recognition for the 2018 exhibit showcasing four outstanding Floyd County basket makers, including Iowa (Griffith) Cockram Haynes. The third of ten children, she and her sisters likely wove the splint seats for chairs made by their father, Tyler Griffith. Iowa transferred her seat-weaving skills into basket making.

As a widow living in the Hay Cocks section of Floyd County, Haynes supported herself by selling painted splint baskets she made from pounded white ash. The baskets she wove and decorated in 1921 for Virginia, Marguerite, and Jessie Tise, the three daughters of the town's Lutheran minister, are part of the permanent collection.

The Gallery holds other small treasures such as an early soapstone sundial, a spring bowl, woven coverlets, painted baskets, and prehistoric stone tools. For special exhibits, staff members draw from the community and share broader views of local knowledge, skills, and history passed along to younger generations.

The Floyd Story Center oral history program collects and archives stories, film, audio, transcripts, and topical photos.

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COURTESY OF OLD CHURCH GALLERY

Iowa Haynes suffered from arthritis in her hands in her later years. This photo shows creams on the dresser beside her that she used to ease her arthritis.



method of basket making had reached a woman in such a rural community.

Whenever I had an opportunity, I talked to members of Iowa's family and others in the community who had known her, trying to find any mention or evidence of someone else in the region who might have lived in the Northeast or had ever traveled there. I still found no known connection outside of the area.

One night when I was working on the computer at home, I did a search for "Algonquin baskets" and found a reference to a 1915 pamphlet titled *Decorative Art of Indian Tribes of Connecticut*, written by anthropologist Frank Speck, who studied the

Paint decoration on this market basket includes hatching, floral images with dots, and triangles in red, yellow, and green, bordered by horizontal black lines top and bottom. It also has a single notch handle and ash cross-lashing on the rim. Larger than most of the other examples, it measures 15 inches high by 16 inches long by 12 inches wide.





This unusual basket is circular at the top with black-painted ash cross-lashing and decoration on the rim. The background of pink paint is decorated with triangles, dots, and floral medallions in black and green. It measures 12 inches high by 10 inches long by 11 inches wide.

the Algonkian peoples of the Eastern Woodlands for much of his life. Not only did it describe how to make the splints, but how to size them, and make the wooden paint brushes.

The pamphlet also described how to make the paint from native materials (though Iowa purchased her paints), and it showed some of the Algonquin painted designs Iowa might have copied (along with creating some of her own).

I finally had an apparent explanation for how a woman in rural Virginia in the 1920s could have learned about a very different kind of basket from those in her local tradition of basket making.

The round-bottomed egg baskets in rural Virginia were always made from narrow oak splints and were rarely decorated, yet Iowa had learned to use wide ash splints to make rectangular, flat-bottomed baskets with painted decoration.

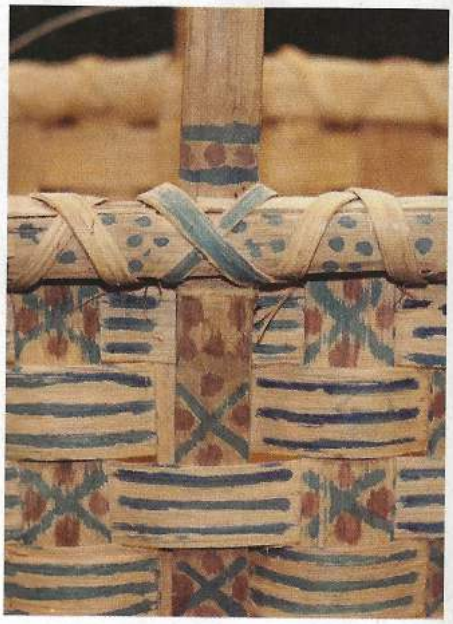
Had she actually taught herself how to do that from a pamphlet? And where did she find that pamphlet? Until 1936, Floyd County was very rural with only narrow gravel roads and no major highways passing through. Very few "outsiders" would have traveled through before the Blue Ridge Parkway opened in 1966.

It has still not been proven that Iowa Haynes actually obtained a copy of *Decorative Art of Indian Tribes of Connecticut*. All I know for sure through many interviews of her surviving relatives and friends is that she was known to make and sell baskets from her home to family, friends, and neighbors, that a significant number of her baskets survive in the surrounding area, and that her baskets share an uncanny similarity to the baskets described and illustrated in that pamphlet.

The unanswered question is "How could she have obtained access to information about making a Northeastern Indian style of basket?" I finally concluded that the most likely explanation is that someone involved with the mission schools established in the early 1900s in the region by New England Protestant denominations had brought the pamphlet to Virginia.

The purpose of these schools was to educate the "mountain youth" and in some cases to offer education to adults as well. Crafts or other products that might be produced by the communities were sometimes bought by the schools and sent back





The maker of one of six baskets by the same unknown hand in the early 1900s might have been a member of Iowa Haynes's family. Unlike Haynes's baskets, this example is made with oak splints. The single notch handle and cross-lashing on the rim both have dot decoration, while the body has hatching, Xs, and dots in blue and brown paint. The basket measures 8 inches high by 7.5 inches long by 6 inches wide.



to New England to be sold to support the schools.

We know children in some schools were taught to weave rugs and other textiles, stitch needlework, and make baskets, which would then be sold by the schools. Perhaps a teacher at a nearby school brought the pamphlet when he or she came to teach, or possibly someone put it in a care package sent to the schools.

It is clear that Iowa Haynes could not have learned to make her baskets from a local basket maker, because the tradition of this style did not exist in Floyd County, Virginia. We might never know for sure how this Native American practice was passed on to Iowa Haynes, but we do

This is the only Haynes-made basket the author has seen with paint on the handle. The basket body has hatching, half circles, and dots around the rim, painted in black, red, and green paint. Like her other baskets, it has a single notch handle and cross-lashing on the rim. It measures 10 inches high by 10 inches long by 8 inches wide.



This Haynes basket has a single notch handle and cross-lashing on the rim like the others, with Xs, hourglass shapes, and asterisks with dots rendered in green, red, black, and yellow. It measures 13.5 inches high by 14 inches long by 11.5 inches wide.



know that she as the maker of these unusual baskets, she has helped keep an earlier, and unrelated, cultural tradition alive. ⋆

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The maker of this basket is also unknown, though several people in the community who were related to Iowa Haynes said that their relatives made baskets. Unlike Haynes's baskets, it has oak splints and the only handle with a nail securing it to the rim. Hatching in red and green decorates the handle. Half-circles, lines, Xs, and dots decorate the body in red, green, blue, black, and yellow. The basket measures 12 inches high by 12 inches long by 11.5 inches wide.

