

## Conservation Record

University of Delaware

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**Accession Number:** 95-1-17

**Owner:** Bryn Mawr College

**Conservator:** Sean Billups

**Object:** Basket

**Culture:** Tlingit

**Location of Origin:** North America, United States or Canada, Southern Alaska, Tlingit Culture

**Entry date:** February 11, 2020

**Reason for Entry:** For ARTC464 class at University of Delaware

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### Description:

- Woven cylindrical basket
- Medium to dark brown
- The basket is assumed to be made of spruce root, highly likely due to the vast collections of similar works from Tlingit makers all made of the same material.
- This basketry exhibits 3 distinct forms of weave in different sections:
  - The majority of the basket is a 2-ply twining, where the strands are twisted towards the weaver, forming a Z pattern on the finished work.
  - The bottom 5.7cm shows a weave that the Tlingit refer to as “Frog’s skin”. It is a coarser weave than the 2-ply twining, and is made by “twining the two woof (weft) strands over a pair of warp splints, that, in the successive spirals of weave, break joints perpendicularly, giving a diagonal appearance to the surface”<sup>1</sup>.
  - The final type of weave is the finishing weave at the top. It is a complex weave 3 wefts high.
- The upper portion of the basket exhibits a decorative element over the top of the 2-ply twining, called wrapped weft, which consists of a separate, differently-colored strand twisted around the weft strand as it goes around the warp. The result is a decorative weave that does not cross to the inside of the structure of the basket, twisting the



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<sup>1</sup> Emmons, 216

opposite direction and creating an 's' shape over the weft, in opposition to the 'z' direction of the structural weave.

- The decorative elements are separated into three horizontal bands about 8cm high, with the top and bottom bands a copy of each other and the middle band unique. Faint traces of color suggest that the top and bottom bands may have been black and the middle band red. The wefts were dyed, resulting in the structure of the basket, contrasting with the wrapped weft decoration.

**Dimensions:** 19.6 x 21.5 x 20.9 cm

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**Materials:** Spruce root, dyed grasses

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### **Historical Context:**

This basket is from the northern Tlingit people, who reside in what is now southern Alaska.

Spruce root was harvested in late spring from small-diameter trees. Roots around 0.5cm in diameter and smaller were harvested, stripped of their bark, and split into thinner strands. The outermost part of the root, with its smooth surface, was the most desirable, and constituted the face of the basket in the weft. This is visible on the outside of the basket, where the weft strands are smooth and convex. The inner strands still had suitable strength and size, and were used for the warps. These warps are slightly visible in some places, but are mostly covered up by the smooth-faced wefts. The innermost section of the root included the pith and was thrown away<sup>2</sup>.

The size and shape of the basket suggest that this was likely a mid-sized berry basket, though it is lacking the loop handles common in Tlingit berrying baskets<sup>3</sup>. According to Frank Porter, these mid-sized berry baskets were between 20-38cm, with two fabric handles sewn on opposite sides. These baskets were carried on the back, with strap over the forehead. When full, the smaller front baskets were dumped into the larger back baskets<sup>4</sup>.

The majority of this basket is made of 2-ply twining, which is the most common weave in Tlingit basketry, composing the majority of their work.

The basket exhibits a decorative weave, sometimes called "false embroidery", or, more accurately, "wrapped-weft", on the outside, typical of the Northern Tlingit. Grasses were dyed and integrated into the basket during the construction in such a way that they were at the outside surface only, not passing through to the interior of the work<sup>5</sup>. This leaves it susceptible to surface abrasion.

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<sup>2</sup> Emmons, 214

<sup>3</sup> Porter, 305

<sup>4</sup> Porter, 305

<sup>5</sup> Emmons, 214

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**Condition Summary:**

Overall condition of the basket is unstable, darkened, brittle and damaged. 4 large losses are evident in the upper rim, 5 smaller losses throughout the body, and significant abrasion resulting in loss of decorative grass. 6 fabric patches have been applied on the interior of the basket over splits in the weave, the largest of which extends from 3 o'clock to 6 o'clock on the lower edge. The fabric is faded white, and likely cotton (visual identification) and exhibits a raw, unfinished edge. The fabric of all 6 patches appears to be the same type.

On the surface of the basket, there is significant grime and dust build-up, particularly in between the wefts (see fig. 2, approx. 50x magnification, at right).

**Face A: 6 o'clock**

Fig. 3 will serve as face A, and the large loss in the rim will serve as the 6 o'clock orientation.



Fig. 3

- Darkening of the upper rim, primarily top 4cm.
- At the upper rim, there is a large loss measuring 4.6cm wide and 5cm deep at the bottom, and only 4cm deep at the shallowest side. There is a warp on the left

side broken, with a loss measuring 0.8cm long and the width of a single warp--approximately 0.2cm.

- Right side of large loss, 0.8cm from top rim and extending down
- 3.8cm from the top rim and intersecting the large loss on the left side, a split 2cm long extends across 9 warps.
- 4.2cm from the rim on the right side of the large loss, a 1.6cm split extends from the loss across 5 warps.
- At 5 o'clock, and 1.5cm from the right side of the large loss, a smaller loss is evident in the rim, measuring 3.4cm wide and 0.4cm tall. This loss resides solely in the decorative rim weave; it does not extend into the structural weave.



Fig. 4

- At 5 o'clock, beneath the rim loss, a series of small holes are evident, which extend through the basket wall. The pattern is approximately 3cm wide and 4cm tall, and, in context with a similar pattern of holes on the opposite side of the basket at 10 o'clock, suggest the loss of sewn-on cloth handles common to Tlingit berrying baskets (fig. 4, approx. 50x magnification, left).

- At 4 o'clock, a vertical split 2.3cm long extends across 12 wefts.
- Underneath the 4 o'clock split, and 4.4cm from the top rim, a small, round, dark spot 0.2cm in diameter is present over the decorative wrapped weft. Its presence over the eagle-shaped decoration suggests that it could be the last remaining eye of all the eagle figures on the basket, though there are no traces of eyes on any of the other figures. Its placement suggests this spot is intentional, and worth further analysis (fig. 5, approx. 50x magnification, right).
- From the left upper corner of the large loss and extending 2.7cm towards 6:30, the very top of the decorative weave at the top rim shows loss, the depth of 1 weft.
- Just after 7 o'clock and 3.2cm from the previously-mentioned loss, another upper rim loss 0.5cm wide and a depth of 1 weft.
- Just past 6 o'clock and 2.5cm from the bottom rim, 6(?) broken wefts show loss of material over the warps
- At the bottom rim just 1.5cm to the left of the previously-mentioned broken wefts, 2 consecutive broken wefts over the same warp.
- At the bottom rim, from 6 o'clock to 3 o'clock, a 12.8cm split



Fig. 5

**Face B: 10 o'clock**

Fig. 6, Face B



Fig. 6

- Most of the upper rim, from 9 to 11 o'clock, shows loss of the top decorative weave, which composes the top 3 wefts, and also the tops of the warps. Measured against the rest of the decorative rim weave, the loss is approximately 0.5cm tall. The color of the tops of the warps in this area are generally lighter than the rest of the darkened roots, suggesting this loss is from a more recent break.
- 3.5cm from the start of the 9 o'clock rim loss, a small area of 2 wefts, 1.8cm long, of the decorative weave remain.
- At 10 o'clock, 3.3cm x 3.5cm, a series of small holes, likely needle-holes, corresponds with a similar pattern at 5 o'clock, may be signs of removed cloth handles.
- Around 11 o'clock, 6 warps broken off at various heights, forming a slope into the decorative part of the rim. The tallest of these is 1 warp from what was the top of the rim.
- On the tops of these warps, there are traces of a glossy adhesive, which darkens the warps as well as the top 2 wefts, extending about 2cm wide in total.
- From the previously-mentioned broken-off warps, a 1.7cm loss of the top 3 wefts in the decorative weave of the rim.
- At 10 o'clock at the bottom rim, 2 broken wefts and 6 broken warps leave a 0.8cm horizontal loss approximately 0.2cm high.

- 2cm above the previous loss, an area about 0.6cm x 0.6cm shows broken warps and wefts
- 1.8cm to the right of the previous area of loss, broken weft

**Face C: 2 o'clock**

Fig. 7, Face C



Fig. 7

- 1 o'clock, large loss measuring 4cm wide at the bottom and 8cm wide at the top and approximately 2.4cm tall.
- At the left side of the loss, a horizontal split about 2cm long extends from the loss, then down 0.8cm across 6 wefts, then right again, horizontally, for 0.6cm. The split is covered on the interior by a fabric patch measuring 3.8cm x 3.8cm.
- A glossy adhesive covers the aforementioned split, measuring 1cm x 3cm, extending downwards at about -40 degrees.
- At the left side of the loss, a vertical split extends down 1.1cm to intersect a horizontal split approximately 3.5cm wide.
- At 1 o'clock, at the bottom rim of the basket, a series of broken and badly-abraded warps measures about 2cm wide.
- Traces of the adhesive can be found along top of the upper rim, suggesting previous repair attempts.
- 3 o'clock, 1.5cm from the top rim, a staple-like fastener extends through the weave, the ends of the staple extending out about 0.5cm along the interior walls

of the basket. Testing with a magnet revealed that the staple is magnetic, indicating that the staple is iron.

- Held in place by the staple is a small piece of material which, under approximately 50x magnification, appears to be paper-based (fig. 8, approx. 50x magnification, right).



Fig. 8

### Bottom Face

Fig. 9, Bottom Face



Fig. 9

- 11 & 12 o'clock, small dark-colored thread tied through the bottom of the basket (fig. 10, approx. 50x magnification, right)

- 4 o'clock, 3.5cm from the center, a series of broken wefts above two parallel warps are visible.
- Darkening of the root.
- Surface dust and grime.



Fig. 10

**Interior Face, from top**

Fig. 11, Interior face

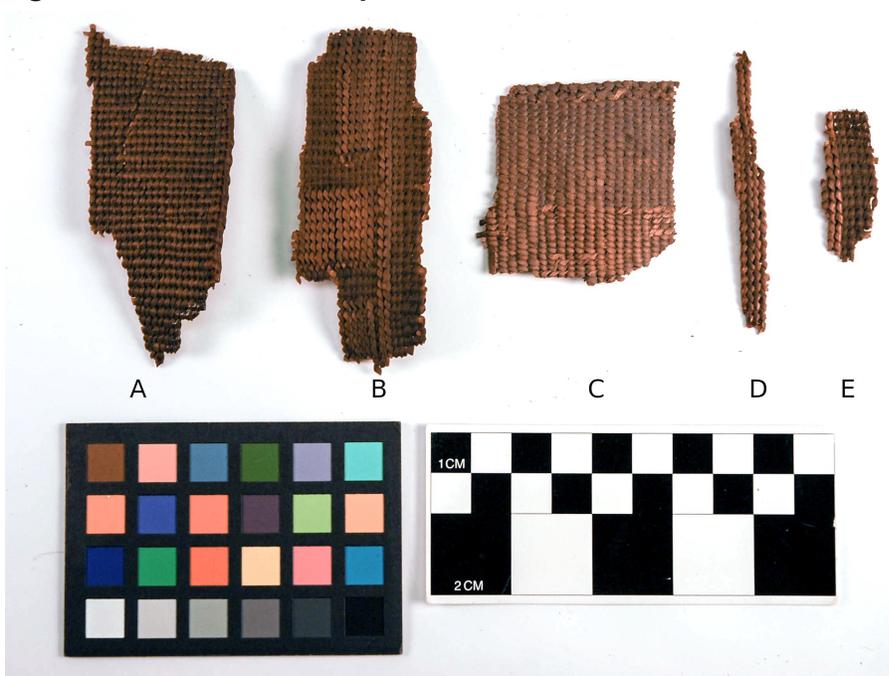


Fig. 11

- The interior exhibits 6 separate cloth patches covering 5 splits/areas of loss. 2 of the patches cover the largest split (12.8cm long) from 6 o'clock to 3 o'clock, on the bottom rim.
- 1 o'clock, the 3.8cm x 3.8cm patch covering the split from the rim loss from 1-2 o'clock. Traces of adhesive on the basket weave near upper left corner, lower left corner, and along right side.

- 2 o'clock, directly below the rim loss at the bottom rim, a cloth patch, seems to be a 3.8cm x 3.8cm square patch with the upper right corner cut off. Bottom edge: 3.8cm, left edge: 3.8cm, top edge: about 1.5cm.
- Interior of the 10 o'clock loss at the lower rim, 3.8cm x 3.8cm cloth patch.
- Interior of the loss just after 6 o'clock and 2.5cm from bottom rim, 3.8cm x 3.8cm cloth patch.
- 3 o'clock to 6 o'clock, interior of the large split at the bottom rim, 2 cloth patches, 3.8cm x 7cm and 3.8cm x 10cm. These 2 patches overlap and cover the large rim split.
- 1cm from center, 3-5 o'clock, dark thread tied through the weave, corresponding to outer thread.
- Surface dirt, dust, and grime.

**Figs. 12 & 13, unattached pieces**



**Fig. 12, Unattached pieces, exterior**

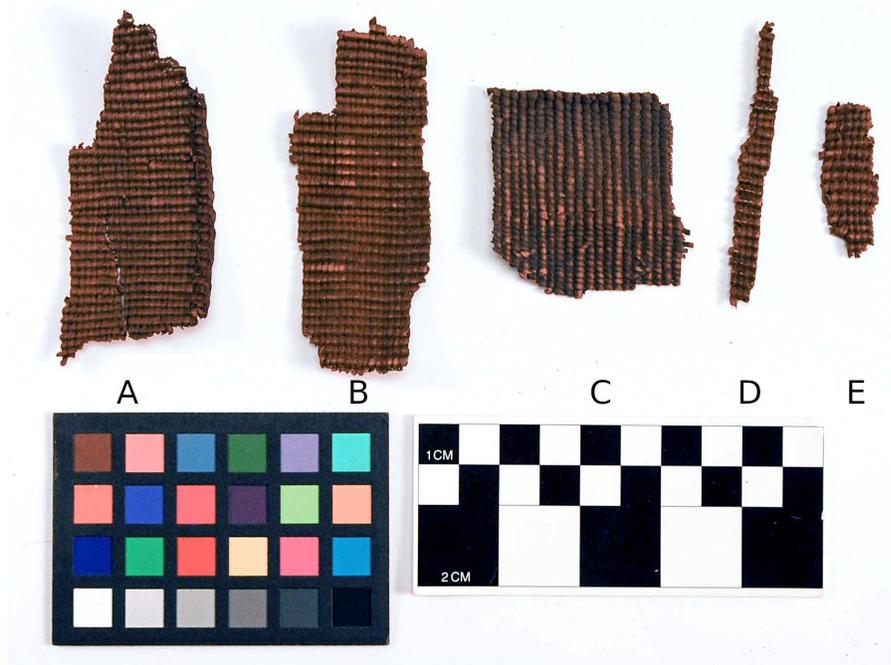


Fig. 13, Unattached pieces, interior

Measurements and condition of the loose pieces are as follows, from left to right:

- A: 9cm x 3.7cm: the color of this piece is warmer than the structural weave of the basket, and the red rim weave--only 2 wefts high--does not match, indicating that this piece does not belong to 95-1-17.
- B: 9cm x 3.5cm: the color of this piece is also slightly warmer than the basket, and does not seem to correspond to any of the areas of loss. The wrapped weft weave also seems to not match, either, lacking the abrasion present on the basket.
- C: 5cm x 5cm: Of the 5 pieces, this is the only one which seems to match the weave of the basket. The shape, size, and weave match the large loss at 6 o'clock, as does the level of surface abrasion and embedded grime.
- D: 7.2cm x 0.8cm: this piece does not seem to correspond with any of the areas of loss, and it lacks the abrasion and surface grime of the basket.
- E: 3.7cm x 1.4cm: This piece seems closer in color to the basket, however, the wrapped-weft decoration has a much higher sheen, the wefts are larger in diameter, and it does not seem to correspond with any of the areas of loss.

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#### Treatment Proposal:

- Surface cleaning
  - Initial cleaning would entail use of a soft brush and a vacuum to remove build-up of surface dust and grime.
  - Follow-up with soft sponge for removal of loose material.

- Further clean with Groom/Stick to remove more deeply-embedded material.
- Removal of previous stabilization
  - Previous work involved the use of cloth patches and glossy adhesive to stabilize the basket at points of loss and breaks. Careful removal of these patches and the adhesive would help to restore the aesthetics of the basket and provide an opportunity to carry out less visible and more effective repairs.
  - Removal of the patches is expected to include:
    - Attempt mechanical removal of adhesive to carry out solubility testing separately.
      - If not suitable, solubility testing in place on the basket.
    - Once an effective solute is found which is non-destructive to spruce root, removal of adhesive with that solute.
  - Removal of iron staple and remnants of paper tag.
- Stabilization of splits and areas of loss
  - After removal of the cloth patches, the basket would be unstable without interventive work. Use of toned japanese paper, with a suitable adhesive, to stabilize the splits.
  - Reattachment of large loss at 6 o'clock.
  - Once splits are stabilized, search for a suitable fill to enable visual cohesiveness.

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## Treatment

- Most of the surface cleaning was carried out.
  - The object was cleaned with a vacuum close to the surface and a paintbrush used to dislodge dust and dirt. Vacuuming was completed in about an hour.
  - The surface was then cleaned with a cosmetic sponge. Initial use was too aggressive for the friable surface, and particularly around the wrapped wefts, which flaked off with even the lightest touch with the sponge. The sponge was not used any further around the wrapped weft decoration.

### **Sources Cited**

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Jonaitis, Aldona. *Art of the Northern Tlingit*. United states of America, University of Washington Press, 1986.