

Abenaki Ash-Splint Basket

c. 1895-1910



Donated by Susan Chandler

Chosen by Jane Alper

PHA Board

This basket was in the Chandler family for over 100 years. Its unusually large size and its shape suggest that it was used for storing fruit, vegetables, or household items. Similar baskets made by Abenaki craftspeople during the late 19th and early 20th centuries were marketed throughout New England.

The Abenaki, a subgroup of the Algonquin Nation, inhabited a large part northeastern North America and continues to have a substantial presence in northern New England and southeastern Canada.

In the early 20th century, Abenakis from the area around Old Towne, Maine, visited Peacham each summer to sell baskets. The style of the Chandler basket resembles those produced by the Maine crafters.

Abenaki baskets were typically constructed of woven ash splints-- uniform strips of ash wood. Ash was particularly valued for basket-making because its narrow, uniformly spaced growth rings made the process of peeling thin splints relatively easy. Wider splints of uniform length were woven to form the base of the basket and then folded upward 90 degrees to form risers. Narrower splints, often of varying widths, were woven horizontally through the risers to form the sides.

The Chandler basket is notable for its exceptionally large size and its ornamentation, including use of vegetable dyes in various colors on some interior splints and the decorative overweave on the exterior, made by twisting each horizontal splint to form a loop before inserting it under the next riser. Abenaki basket makers called this decorative style “cowiss” (the Abenaki word for “pine”) because the pattern resembled that of a pine cone.