

BULLETIN



OF THE

DETROIT MUSEUM OF ART

January, 1904

DETROIT, MICH.

Vol. 1.

Indian Baskets

BY A. H. GRIFFITH.

SOME time since that indefatigable collector, Mr. Frederick Stearns added to his already generous gifts to the Detroit Museum of Art a collection of Indian baskets, among which were many of value and interest. Within the past two weeks Mr. Mentor Wetzstein has made quite an addition to this collection in the way of an indefinite loan of some twenty pieces. In the two collections may be found many curious shapes showing the endless patience and wealth of design which the Indian women display in this kind of work.

Indian baskets may be divided into three classes; the coarse burden baskets; those used for domestic purposes and so tightly woven that they will hold water; and family jewels, the last of course showing the highest degree of skill, seven different weaves being used. The designs are generally conventional.

A touch of civilization renders the work valueless and each year good specimens become more rare. Indian baskets are far more than the mere examples of skill. Read aright, with some knowledge of Indian lore and legend, they reveal a woman's strug-

gles even though she be uneducated, to express that which is beautiful, her religious aspirations, her poems, paintings and historical records.

WOMEN'S WORK.

In all ages and among all races, while man hunted and waged war, woman being the home maker was often the inventor of the crafts, the mother of the arts and the nurse of religion.

Among some of the Indian tribes the basket was the most useful of all their manufacturers, serving them from the cradle to the grave.

In a deftly woven cradle decorated with shells, gay feathers, and bits of cloth, such as would delight a baby, the Indian mother ties her papoose. When there were no baby there were other burdens to carry; wood for the camp fire, meat, fish, grain, nuts, fruit. Even water was brought in a basket woven and adapted to the purpose. The old adage of the pitcher going once too often to the well does not apply to the Indian water basket, for those, woven of strong willow strippings and heavily coated within and without with the gum from the pinon pine, are almost indestructible

HAS VARIED USES.

The large, flat, plaque-shaped basket may be and often is used as a meal tray at home, while heaped with propitiatory gifts to

DETROIT MUSEUM OF ART

Jefferson Avenue and Hastings Street

Incorporated February 16th, 1885

BULLETIN PUBLISHED QUARTERLY

OFFICERS

President, T. D. BUHL Vice-President, Wm. E. QUINBY
 Secretary and Treasurer, FRED E. FARNSWORTH
 Director, A. H. GRIFFITH Editor, C. H. BURROUGHS

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

JOHN McKIBBEN THOMAS PITTS JOHN M. DONALDSON

Hours of Admission

The Museum is open to the public FREE every day in the week from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M., except Sunday and Monday, when the hours are from 2 to 4 P.M.

A lecture on Art, History or Travel is given every Sunday afternoon from October to May, at 3 o'clock

Lecture Announcements.

Feb. 3, 8 p. m. Lime Light Lecture, "The Church in America," her early establishment in Virginia; her missionary work among the colored folks and Indians, and in Alaska. Illustrated with 150 colored views, by Rev. Charles Scadding, Rector Emmanuel Church, La Grange, Ill. Given under the auspices of the Episcopal clergy of Detroit.

Feb. 4, 8 p. m. "Recent Excavations in the East," by Prof. George Foot Moore, D. D., of the chair of Biblical Literature and the History of Religions, Howard University, and Recording Secretary of the Oriental Society. This lecture will re-

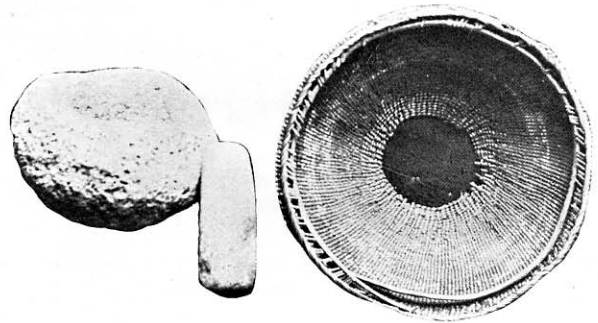
Indian Baskets—continued

appease an angry god it may adorn some village altar; and it is perhaps most prized at a wedding, where the bride and groom must eat their first meal from no other dish, and when an Indian dies it is filled with fruit and other edibles and placed on his grave, that his spirit may regale itself on its journey to the happy hunting grounds. Again it may be seen used as a gambling board round which the dusky rakes squat and upon which they toss their dice. No one form of basket shows more varied form of pattern, every line is eloquent with meaning when rightly interpreted. Unfortunately the same design often has different meanings to different tribes. A design which looks like a flash of lightning to the desert Indian, whose every thought is directed toward signs of rain, will to a tribe living among the mountains mean a waterfall, or to those living near the sea may represent the incoming tide, and so one may go on in an endless effort to get at the real meaning. But there is hardly a basket that does not somewhere in its intricate weave contain a prayer.

To the Indian squaw, nature is the one thing which she silently studies most and which she strives to copy, but natural objects must be conventionalized in order to be available within the limitations of basketry, so every object must be adapted to her material.

AN ANCIENT INDUSTRY.

The weaving of baskets is perhaps one of the most ancient of all Indian industries. They are found in the oldest graves of the cliff dwellers, and curious enough, the forms and decorative de-



signs are identical with those used today, showing that the art was handed down from one generation to another. It would seem from the numerous specimens found, compared with an equal number of pieces of pottery, that the basketmaker was far in advance of the potter, whose work is much inferior in every respect. In fact, it would appear that the basket was made to answer every purpose for which the pottery might have been used; as vessels for cooking and storing, for carrying burdens, food trays and meal bowls, for sifting corn meal, and still others without bottoms which were placed on flat stones to hold the corn while it was being pounded with a mortar into meal, while some were so large that bodies have been found buried in them. Some of the baskets thus found still contain the corn and seed placed in them by the original owners generations ago, while others covered with soot show the use made of them in the culinary department.

The ground color of nearly all the modern baskets is a light yellow, the color of the natural willow, while the decorations are in black or a dull reddish brown, and usually of a geometric design, though some of the more highly-prized specimens show conventionalized human forms as well as animals and birds. These were used for ceremonial purposes, and there is no doubt

Lecture Announcements—continued

view the work recently done in Bible lands, Assyria and Palestine, and will be illustrated with the stereopticon. Given by the Detroit Archaeological Society.

Sunday, Feb. 7, 3 p. m. "Talk on Early Christian Art," by Director Griffith.

Wednesday Evening, Feb. 10, 8 p. m. "The Fjords and Fjelds of Norway," illustrated with stereopticon by Mr. Frank Edward Johnson. Mr. Johnson whose pictures of Norway and the Canary Islands now hang in the gallery, has spent several seasons in the former country.

Sunday, Feb. 14, 3 p. m. "The New Life—Florence Awakens and Stirs the Senseless World," by Director Griffith.

Sunday, Feb. 21, 3 p. m. "The Great Master of Milan, Leonardo da Vinci," by Director Griffith.

Sunday, Feb. 28, 3 p. m. "The Stone Cutter of Florence Who Would Brook no Authority," by Director Griffith.

March 3, 8 p. m. "The Empire of Colorado, its Prehistoric Past and Romantic Development." Illustrated by over two hundred colored lantern projections, by Mr. Gilbert McClerg of Colorado Springs. The lecture will be interspersed with Indian legend and Spanish romance, and will be lively with amusing anecdotes of pioneer days.

March 6th being the occasion of the two hundred fiftieth Sunday talk by Director Griffith at the Art Museum, the trustees in consideration of the good done by him in the eleven seasons of this work, deem it fitting to alter the program in such a way as to pay their respects to his labor. The programme will be of wider range than ordinarily, in that other speakers will take part and musical numbers will be interspersed as well as the regular Sunday talk by Mr. Griffith. The hour of three o'clock will mark the time of beginning as usual. The entertainment will be of one hour duration.

Sunday, Mar. 13, 3 p. m. "Raphael," by Director Griffith.

Sunday, Mar. 20, 3 p. m. "Master Colorists of the Water Republic—Bellini, Titian Paul Veronese, and Tintoretto," by Director Griffith.

Sunday, Mar. 27, 3 p. m. "Fight of the late Italian Schools," the Eclectics or Bolognaisians vs. the Naturalists or Napolitans.

Thursday Evening, Mar. 31, 8 p. m. "Archaeological Explorations and Excavations in Greek Lands," illustrated with Stereopticon by Prof. Thomas Day Seymour of Yale College under the auspices of the Detroit Archaeological Society.

Exhibition Announcements

The exhibitions shown between now and April 1st will be as follows.

From Feb. 1 to Mar. 1. An exhibition of eighty watercolors of subjects in the Canary Islands and amongst the fjords and fjelds of Norway by Mr. Frank Edward Johnson will be shown in the main gallery. Mr. Johnson has studied abroad many years; in Paris and Munich among other places, and this collection represents his last two years work in Norway and the Canary Islands.

From Feb. 6 to 22. An exhibition of landscapes in oils, watercolors and etchings by Mr. E. T. Hurley, of the Rookwood Pottery, Cincinnati, Ohio, will be shown in the McMillan gallery of the Museum. Mr. Hurley spent the greater part of the summer of 1903 about Detroit and the near Lake Regions,

and many of his subjects are so familiar as to be recognized at a glance.

From February 22 to March 1. An exhibition of paintings of Venice, thirty-two in number by Oliver Dennett Grover of Chicago, will be exhibited on one wall of the main gallery. These paintings is the more recent work of Mr. Grover, he having painted them during the summer of 1903 in Venice.

From Mar. 1 to April 1. An exhibition of the works of Howard Pyle comprising illustrations in oil, pen and ink and crayon. One of America's most prominent illustrators, his works in this exhibition will be the originals of many familiar to us through the leading magazines and books.

Indian Baskets—continued

that some of the curious types of decoration were symbolic. Some of the old basketmakers always wove some story or bit of tribal or family history into the patterns, and these are held in high esteem by the Indians. They hand them down to their children, who part with them very reluctantly and only when in want or tempted by a large sum.



HOME OF THE INDUSTRY.

California has long been known as the home of the basket makers. Within the borders of that state baskets of practically every known variety of weave and every conceivable form are made. The collecting of material for this work is slow and laborious, and must of necessity be a labor of love. In fact, the whole work is one of unselfish devotion, with no hope of pay in the way of material recompense. Since the whites own the country, even the gathering of common willow is one of difficulty, as the farmer makes use of the trees to prevent washouts; and for the other decorative material long journeys must be made to the mountains, canyons, lake and seashore—red bud stems, maiden-hair fern, bark from the roots of the tule, feathers from the crest of the woodpecker, mallard duck and quail, and from the breast of the lark, bluebird and oriole, all arranged on their jewel baskets with wonderful artistic harmony of color. These, together with polished bits of abalone shell or the milk white wampum beads, make a basket fit in the Indians' eyes for matrimonial barter or funeral gifts.

And all this work is done in a comfortless hut that is racked and tossed by winter winds and rains, and scorched by the summer sun, with beaten earth for a floor, bed or pillows, according to the need of the hour. Here the leather-faced squaw of four score and ten, with a rude bone needle, a bunch of willow and grass and unlimited time, what can she not produce?

But the years come and go, the march of the vandal is sweeping the land, and soon, all too soon, the Indian basket will be numbered among the lost arts, to be rarely seen outside of museums and private collections. Already, like the Indian blanket, the craft has felt the influence of civilization, and the aniline dye has taken the place of the old naturally colored roots sought for so industriously. The weave is coarser and more hurriedly put together that he may sell the tourist a souvenir of his western trip.

Museum Notes

This publication of the Museum makes in this number its first appearance. It will be issued and distributed hereafter every quarter. A motive for its publication we find in the desire to keep the constituents of the Museum informed as to what the faculty are doing for the people, and what the people are doing for the institution. We hope it will answer some of the questions that arise in the mind of the public regarding the Museum, and impart knowledge as well.

We propose in it to discuss every branch of our work from time to time, in order to give a clearer conception of what this museum is. It now not only embraces the fine arts—painting and sculpture—but has as well an Egyptian Department of Archaeology, Department of Science and Natural History, Department of Japan, China and Korea, an Ethnological Department, which embraces nearly every country in the world, and a Historical Collection which is very extensive and very interesting. Some feature of one of the departments will be discussed in each BULLETIN. A copy or copies of the BULLETIN will be sent to any address regularly upon receipt of a request sent to the editor.

The attendance at the museum during the month of January as shown by the register was 9,969.

Four exhibitions have been held thus far since Nov. 1, 1903. Mr. Birge Harrison of Quebec, Mr. H. Nakagawa of Tokio, Japan, Miss Jeanette Guysi of Detroit and Mr. A. E. Albright of Edison, Ill., were the exhibitors.

The special exhibitions now hanging are those of Frank Edward Johnson and E. T. Hurley.

One of the features which makes the Detroit Museum of Art so valuable as a part of the educational system of the city is the lecture course which it carries on so extensively. Aside from the regular Sunday afternoon talk of thirty minutes, the directors and faculty are often called to the various schools and educational societies of the city to interpret some topic for which the Detroit Museum furnishes specimens. Many clubs, societies and schools likewise visit the museum for the same interpretations and to study by object.

During this month Director Griffith has given beside his Sunday talks seven others, five of them being outside the museum but in the city of Detroit.

Mr. Griffith began the first Sunday in the year a series of talks, taking up connectedly the Development of Art from its beginning to the art of our own age. Those in January were as follows:—Jan. 3, "Egyptian Art," Director Griffith; Jan. 10, "Greek Painting and Sculpture in its relation to the people," Assistant Burroughs; Jan. 17, "Greek Sculpture centering in the Parthenon," Director Griffith; Jan. 24, "Greek Sculptors," Director Griffith; Jan. 31, "Roman Art as revealed in the ruins of Pompeii," Director Griffith.

On Jan. 22 Assistant Burroughs talked on "A trip through Europe" at the McKinley School.

The Parmenas Club visited the museum in a body Jan. 25th and listened to a talk on "French Art" by the Director.

The first number of a free lecture course arranged by the Normal Training School was given at the Park School Jan. 29. Mr. A. H. Griffith of the museum, with stereopticon, gave some impressions of "Rome, its palaces and ruins."

We received a call from Buffalo a short time since for a loan of some of our Japanese material to be used as illustration for a series of lectures on Japan. The Stearns collection of Japanese objects is one of the finest in the country and embraces nearly all

the products of that country. The material sent them were articles illustrating the life of the people, their customs, and their artistic products.

The legislative acts and legal proceedings relating to the museum from the time of its incorporation in 1885 to the present time will be compiled and issued in pamphlet form. The museum in its fifteen years of existence has made wonderful progress toward a municipal institution. A private corporation at the beginning, an act was promulgated making it free to the public and receiving for the concession partial support from the municipality in the payment of running expenses. Last year a new legislative act provided that the city of Detroit may appropriate \$50,000 for the erection of an addition to the present museum building. The transaction involved the transfer of the museum real estate from the corporation to the city of Detroit, and the last steps are now being taken by the common council of the city which will place the Detroit Museum on exactly the same basis as the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The museum remains open to the public, free at all times; the control remains in the hands of the corporation save for three city representatives appointed by the mayor, with the power of trustees. The city of Detroit pays the running expenses of the institution and erects an additional building at a cost of \$50,000.

A suggestion made by one of our most energetic citizens for a purchasing fund is so meritorious in its plan that it will be seriously taken up and carried through. The proposition is so novel and so practical at the same time that it is noteworthy. It is as follows:—Organize a syndicate of say one hundred citizens for the purpose of purchasing an example from each exhibit brought here, that has sufficient merit. The cost to each member would be trifling, and the amount of good accomplished great. Under such a condition it would be possible to bring six or eight of the best exhibits here during each season. The syndicate would have a hanging committee which would at the time of hanging determine whether the exhibition was of sufficient merit to purchase from for the museum collections. If it made a decision to purchase, then the members would vote on the choice of the picture, a majority of votes cast determining the selection. This arrangement would bring better exhibitions and attach more personal interest to the museum.

The ethnological department of the museum has been materially added to by the recent loan to the Museum of a collection of North American Indian and Alaskan Indian material, belonging to Mentor Wetzstein of this city. The collection comprises products of Indian make and use, such as beaded clothing, papoose boards, pipes and a collection of Indian baskets hardly to be excelled in quality. From Alaska, whose native products reach us in but small numbers, Mr. Wetzstein has some fine specimens of carved and polished tusks of the walrus. Perhaps the most curious article in his collection is a perfect chain about two feet in length, cut from a single tusk. New cases have been secured and the collection will soon be arranged and labeled.

Two recent and important pictures have been added to the Museum collections. One a very fine specimen of Robert Hopkin's work, "Setting the Range Lights," was the gift of Wm. C. Weber, of this city. The other is a small but excellent specimen of Ma'am Ronner's cats, "Kittens Musing." This picture was acquired for the Museum by the Director on his recent trip to Europe. Ma'am Ronner, of Brussels, is meritoriously accorded the title, "the greatest living cat painter."

Within the past year there has been many calls, some even from Europe, for photographs of the pictures owned by the Detroit Museum of Art. In order to meet this demand all the pictures are being photographed. Half tones will also be made of them for the next issue of the Hand Book and many will be reproduced in these pages.