

MUS. COMP. ZOOL.
LIBRARY
ABNAKI INDIAN ARTIFACTS IN CARNEGIE MUSEUM

JAMES L. SWAUGER

Associate Director

Carnegie Museum

MAR 10 1966

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY.

INTRODUCTION

Abnaki Indian artifacts in Carnegie Museum are one lot of nine baskets bought in 1900 by Dr. W. J. Holland, at that time Director of the Museum. Holland bought 11 basketry items; only nine can now be found.

The purchase was formally recorded in an Annual Report of Carnegie Museum (Holland, 1901: 37), as: "Holland, Dr. W. J. Collection of baskets, eleven specimens, showing modern work of the Abenaki [sic] Indians of Old Town, Maine. Purchase. July 7, 1900. . . . (1456) [Accession Number]."

Although Holland spelled the term "Abenaki" in his original description of the collection, and all Carnegie Museum records repeat the usage, I here use "Abnaki" since it is a well established, more widely used, and more acceptable form of the designation (Hodge, 1907: 2; Swanton, 1952: 13; Murdock, 1958: 98).

As Holland bought the baskets at Old Town, they were probably made by members of the Penobscot tribe (Federal Writers' Project, 1937:295, 296), but here they will be called only Abnaki, a generic term designating an Algonquian confederacy centering in Maine.

These were commercial items. Although woven in checkerboard fashion, the simplest sort of technique, there is no monotony among them. They are bright, attractive, intended to woo customers. They are dyed in earthy colors: olive brown and olive green, light-yellow ocher, and raw umber. Weft splints vary in width and were woven to produce pleasant textural patterns. Thin ropes of sweet grass were substituted for some warp splints on some baskets to add even greater variety. Rows of projecting ornaments occur, made by twisting a splint into a loop or

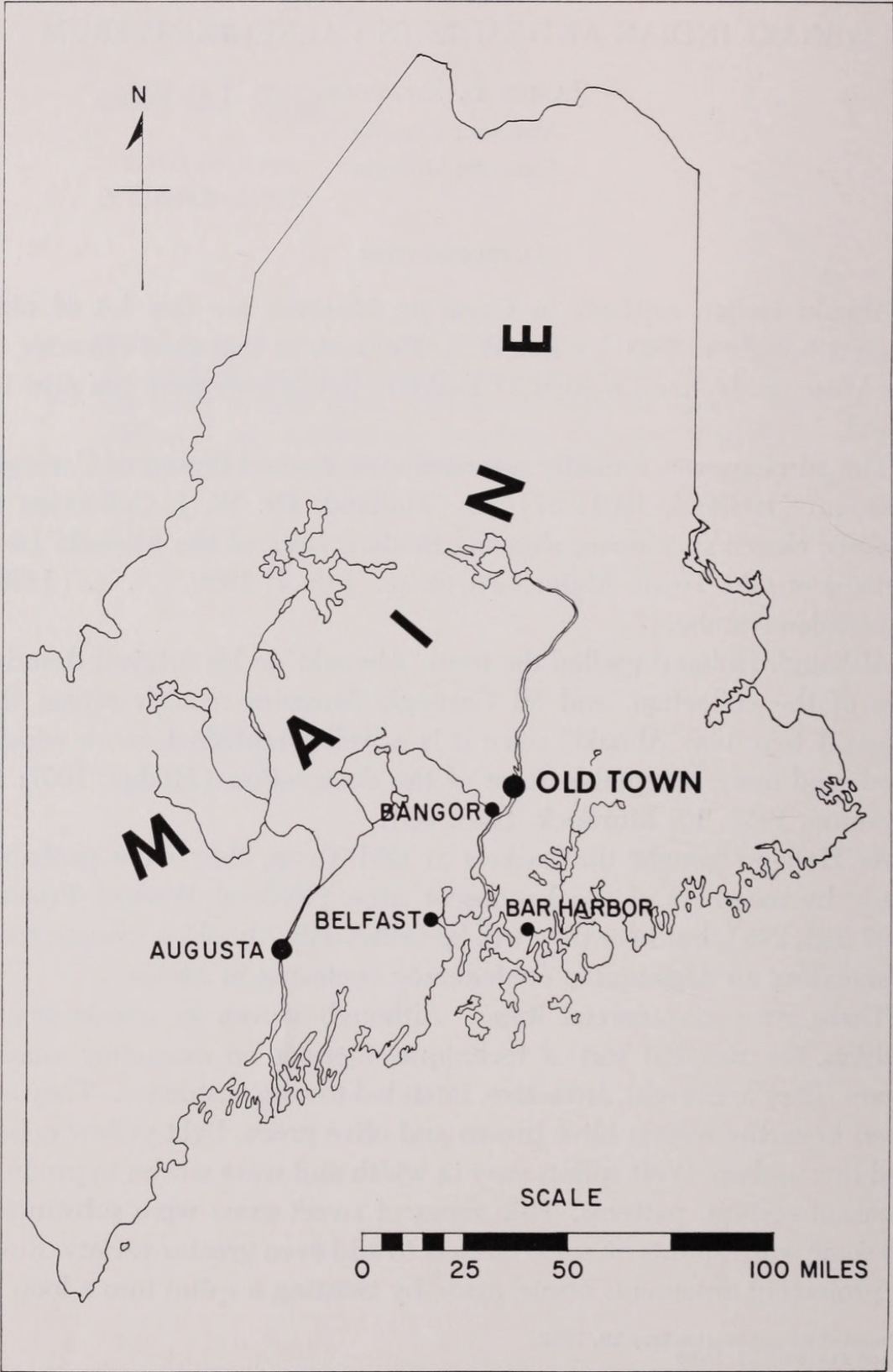


Fig. 1

loops after pulling it under a warp stick and before passing it under another. Lid handles in the form of ends of corn cobs, loops, flat ropes of grass, and flattened coils of grass ropes add further embellishment. Splints are of ash. The baskets do not deviate from the general description of "Algonkin and Iroquois Basketry," given 15 years before Holland's purchase, in Mason's *Basket-work* . . . (Mason, 1885: 305, 396 pl. lviii, fig. 96) and must be considered good representations of Abnaki basketry at the turn of the century.

MUS. COMP. TOOL.
LIBRARY

MAR 10 1966

DESCRIPTIONS

HARVARD
UNIVERSITY

All measurements are given in centimeters. Colors were defined for me by Clifford J. Morrow, Jr., Chief of the Special Exhibits Staff, Carnegie Museum. All items are baskets.

1456/1. Not found when the collection was listed on January 16, 1936. It was noted on a file card as "Basketry napkin ring . . ."

1456/2. (Fig. 2) Spherical, lidded basket. Lid neck fits into neck of basket. Greater diameter of the body is 34. Interior diameter of neck of basket is 16. Diameter of exterior of neck of lid is 15. Greatest diameter of lid is 18. Lid is decorated with a vertical cone shaped like the end of a corn cob. A row of curled splints surrounds the cone at its base. The height of the cone is 5.5. The height of the lid minus the cone is 3. The height of the body of the basket is 25.5. The total height of the basket with lid on and pressed firmly into its seat is 32. The basket is cadmium orange. The cone is olive brown. Eight rows of weft splints on the base are slightly twisted to make an ornamental base projection. There are 21 warp splints, 107 weft splints in the body of the basket. The warp splints average 0.8 wide at the neck, 1.6 at their greatest width, 0.4 where they cross in the center of the base. The weft splints average 0.3 in width. At the neck, the warp splints are gathered and bound to a withe, the binding going over a rope of grass. The rim of the top of the lid is outlined by a rope of grass bound into warp splints. There are 16 warp splints in the lid, and 21 rows of weft splints. On the underside of the lid the warp splints are drawn into a shallow cone. The lid warp splints average 1.2 at the circumference, 0.3 at the center. Weft splints average 0.3 wide. Weft splints of the cone average only 0.1. Greatest width of the cone's warp splints is at their bases, where they average

0.4. The lid flange, which is inserted into the neck of the basket, is 2.4 wide and is bound with splints averaging 1 wide.

1456/3. (Fig. 2, two views) Strawberry- or pine-cone-shaped, lidded basket. Lid fits over basket neck. Greatest diameter of the body, including projections of loops of weft splints is 37.25. Diameter of body of basket at neck, exclusive of projections of loops of weft splints, is 21. Diameter of interior of neck of lid is 22.5. Height of basket without lid is 26.5. Height of lid excluding handle and petal decorations is 6. Height of basket and lid with lid pressed firmly into its seat, and excluding handle and petal decoration is 28.5. The lid is attached to the body by a coil of splint. Opposite the coil is a ring bound to the lid in position to slip over a complementary ring, bound to the body of the basket, to hold the lid firmly on the basket. A rope of grass 22 long ends in a closed loop to make a handle projecting from the lid. The handle rises from a rosette of cut grasses and a circle of 16 dark-brown, leaf-shaped, thin "petals." The body of the basket is a light Alizarin crimson. Ornamentation of the body and the lid is provided by rows of loops of weft splints, 42 on the body, 15 on the lid. There are 20 warp splints, 57 rows of weft splints in the body. There are 20 warp splints in the lid, 31 rows of weft splints. Warp splints of the body are bound at the base to a ring of wood 3.2 in diameter, its center hole 1.5 in diameter. At the rim, the warp splints are bound to a withe. Warp splints of the lid are drawn into a shallow cone on the underside. At the rim of the lid, they are bound to a withe so flexible it might almost be a weft splint. Sixteen rows of light-yellow-ocher splints decorate the underside as well. Warp splints average 1 at the rim of the body, 1.4, ten away from the rim of the body. Weft splints average 0.5. Warp splints of the lid average 1.4 at the rim, 0.3 at the center. Most weft splints average 0.5 wide, but the light-yellow-ocher splints making up the inside decoration average only 0.2.

1456/4. Not found when the collection was described December 21, 1962. It was noted on a file card as "Truncated pyramid, light yellow, 7-1/2" square at base, 12-7/16" high, and 9-1/2" diam. at top . . ."

1456/5. (Fig. 2) Oval, wide-mouthed basket. One splint loop on long diameter. The longest diameter is 11.5. The shortest is 7.5. Depth of body of the basket is 3.5. Distance from bottom of the basket to the top of the handle loop is 8. The splint making up the handle loop continues in a broad oval as a rib along the base. The warp splints are

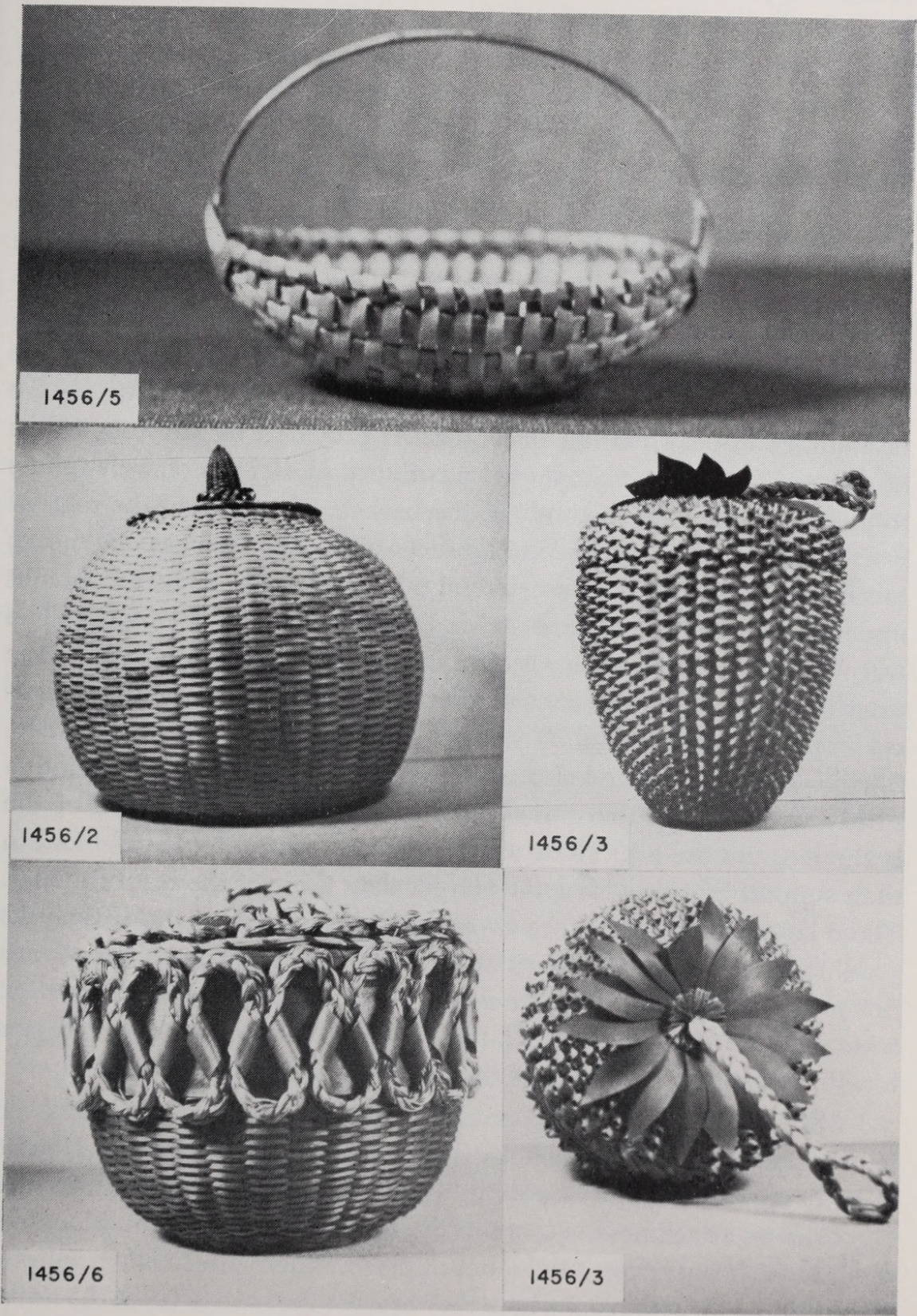


Fig. 2

horizontal, paralleling the line of the handle and base-rib loop. There are eight warp splints. Width of the warp splints in their centers is 0.9. They taper to nearly zero at the ends. There are 33 weft splints, gathered at the ends of the basket into diamond designs where the handle loop crosses the rim withe. This withe is bound into the body of the basket by the weft splints which loop over it. The basket is light-yellow-ocher.

1456/6. (Fig. 2) Round, lidded basket. Lid is loose. Lid neck fits into neck of basket. Greatest diameter of the body of the basket is 17.5. Diameter of the body at the neck is 15. Height of the body to the top of the withe binding the rim is 11.5. Height with lid on, including decoration but excluding loop handle, is 13. The body of the basket is olive brown. Decorations of lid and body include ropes of grass which are raw umber in color. Other decoration is provided by varying widths of splints. There are eighteen warp splints and 41 rows of weft splints to the rim-binding on the body of the basket. Thirty-six of the rows of weft splints average 0.1 wide. The succeeding two rows, as one moves toward the rim from the base, average 2 wide. Three rows are caught under the rim binding. There is a base ring made of a rope of grass. The warp splints are drawn into a cone on the inside of the base. On the exterior rim of the body a rope of grass is drawn into a series of 37 vertical loops measuring 6 high. These are bound into the body by the two, 2-wide weft splints noted above. The rim of the basket is bound into a sturdy withe. Loop decorations like those on the exterior rim of the body decorate the lid. There are 17 of these. They, too, are bound to their support by two weft splints larger than those of the rest of the lid. These large splints (there are two of them) average 1.8 wide. Only 12 small splints are visible. They are 0.2 wide. The 17 warp splints are drawn into a cone on the underside of the lid. These are a bit over 0.2 wide. The rim is bound with a rope of grass, and a loop of grass is a handle at the top. The neck of the lid is 1.5 deep.

1456/7. (Fig. 3) Squat, cone-shaped basket. Lidded. Lid fits over basket neck. Greatest diameter of the body of the basket is 8. Height of body minus lid is 9. Hoop on lid is bound to the body by a splint tie. Opposite its attachment, a loop on the basket corresponds to a loop on the lid which slips over it to lock it in place. There are 12 warp splints. Their widths vary from 0.2 where they cross at the base to 0.9 at the neck. The neck is bound by a flat withe. There are 65 weft splints. These

average 0.2 wide for the most part, but that nearest the neck with is 0.4. The color of the body is olive green. The lid is made up of a rope of grass for a base, a body of 24 warp splints, and 28 ropes of grass serving as weft splints, as well as five conventional weft splints. The warp splints are bound in the interior to a circle of wood. Here they average 0.2 wide. At their distal ends, they average 1.2. Two loops, set opposite each other across the center circle at points where the grass-loop weft splints meet the conventional type, project upward 2. Through them runs a splint loop 10.5 in diameter, bound with a grass rope. The lid is 3.5 from its base to its top, excluding the loops, and has a maximum outside diameter of 10.5. The body of the basket is olive green. Exclusive of the weft splints, which also are olive green, the lid is raw umber.

1456/8. (Fig. 3) Lidded basket. Neck of lid fits into basket. Decorated at neck and base with a row of projecting ornaments formed by twisting weft splints. Diameter of outside of neck of body excluding projections is 18.2. Diameter of the base ring, exclusive of projecting ornaments, is 10. The rim of the body is a rope of grass bound to the body. The base ring is a vertical splint from which the ornaments project. There are 20 warp splints, forming a cone in the bottom of the basket. At the center of the bottom they average 0.4, at the rim, 1. There are 47 rows of weft splints. They average 0.2, except for the next-to-the-top one, 1.3 wide, which forms the projecting ornamentations. The lid has a diameter of 18.5. Its rim is bound with a rope of grass. Its neck is 1.4 deep. It has 19 warp splints which form a downward projecting cone in the center of the underside of the rim. At the center, they average 0.2; at the rim, 1.0. There is a loop handle of a rope of grass, raw umber in color, projecting 5 from the top of the lid. The ends of the rope have been left frayed to add to the decorative effect. Without counting the handle, the lid is 2 high. The warp splints are alizarin crimson, and the weft splints olive brown.

1456/9. (Fig. 3) Round basket. Lidded. Lid fits over body of basket. Smooth, more "western" looking than the rest of the baskets in the collection. The body is 17 in diameter. There are 22 warp splints averaging 0.9 wide. From the base upward there are, first, eight rows of conventional weft splints averaging 0.1 wide, then rows of grass forming a band 4.5 wide, then a splint 1.3 wide just below the rim, which is itself a splint bound to a stout with on the interior. The rim of the base is a rope

of grass. On the bottom are 10 rows of weft splints varying in width from 0.1 to 0.2, then a clear space of 1.7, then nine rows of weft splints averaging 0.1 in width. The warp splints cross on the interior of the base to form a smooth, upward-projecting cone. The body is 8 high. The lid is 18.5 in greatest diameter, including the rope of grass which is the circumference binding. The interior of the neck is 17.8 in diameter. The neck is 2 high. The vertical section of the neck has a base splint 0.4 wide, succeeded by 12 rows of conventional splints 0.1 wide to the rim of the top of the lid, then four rows of conventional splints 0.1 wide. For a distance of 4 toward the center—then a gap of 0.7 occupied by eight rows of conventional splints 0.1 wide—then a section 2.4 wide, there are rows of grasses giving a pleasing decorative effect. From the center of the top of the lid projects a flat loop 3 in diameter bound by a splint into the center of the lid. The color of the basket is light-yellow-ocher.

1456/10. (Fig. 3) Square, lidded basket. Lid fits over neck of basket, not down over, just over. The body is 22 on an edge. Weaving is a simple checkerboard. On the bottom of the body there are 14 splints 1.4 wide forming the main section of the body in both directions. At the corners these wide splints give way to 16 to 18 rows of splints only 0.2 wide on an average, and these in turn alternate with eight to nine rows of grass ropes. The top of the body shows four triangular areas, one on each side, apexes toward the center, and between these and the corners are four triangular areas made up of 36 to 38 rows of narrow splints alternating with 18 to 19 rows of grass ropes. The grass ropes are raw umber, the conventional splints, olive brown. The square hole in the center (not parallel with the sides) is 10.4 on a side on the interior, and bound with a grass rope. A loop is bound to the body along one side of the hole in the center. On the opposite side of the hole two splints bind the square lid to the body. The lid is also bound with a grass rope and has a loop 2.7 in diameter which slips over the loop on the body. The lid has eight warp splints 1.2 wide, exclusive of the edge binding, 37 rows of weft splints averaging 0.2 wide, and 17 rows of grass ropes. The lid is 12 on an edge. Without the lid, the height of the body is 4; with the lid, it is 4.8.

1456/11. (Fig. 3) Pine-cone-shaped basket. Lidded. Lid fits over neck of basket. Decoration is furnished by rows of projecting loops over both body and neck. There are eight warp splints 0.5 wide at the neck,

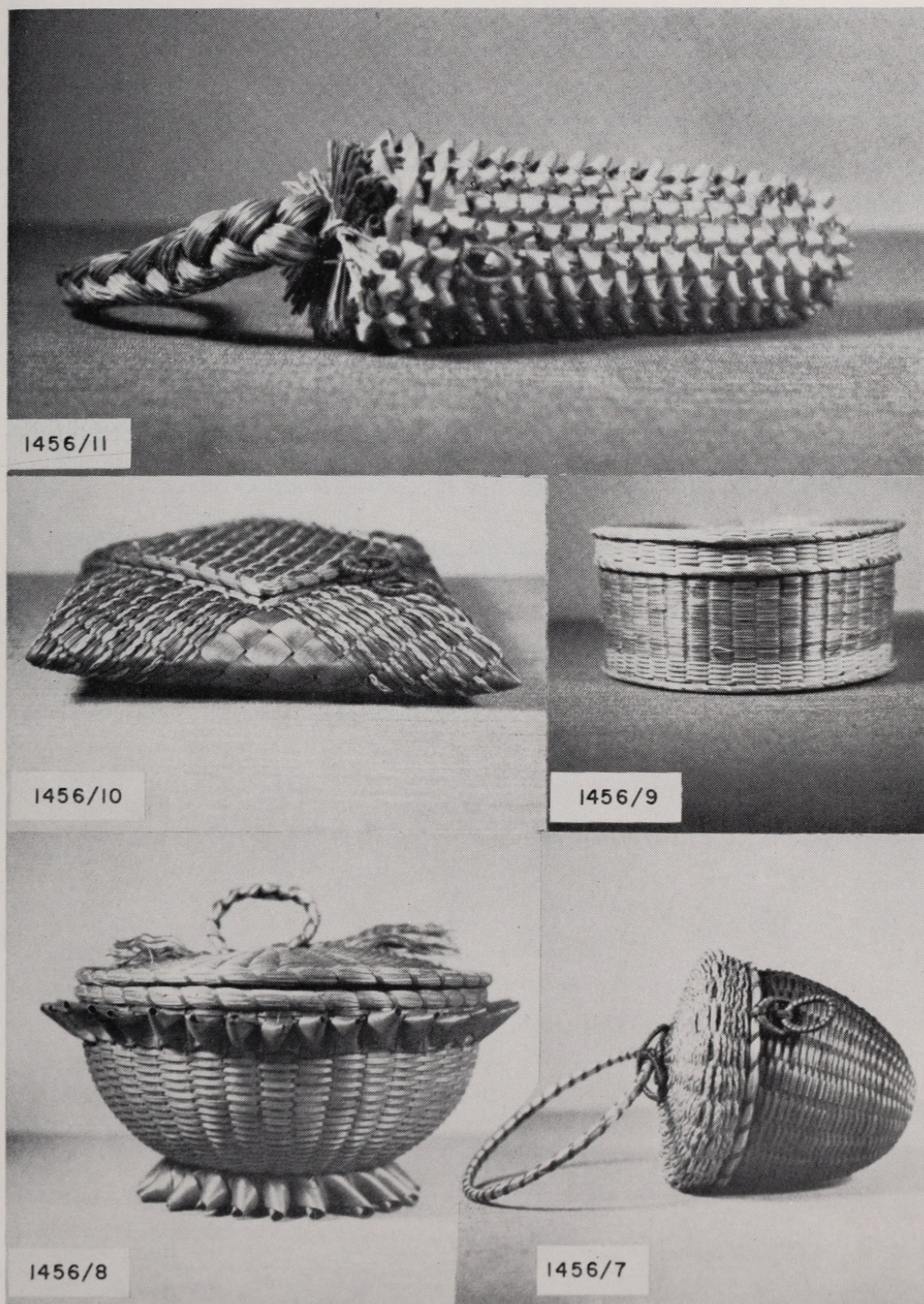


Fig. 3

tapering to 0.1 or slightly less where they cross at the base. There are 37 rows of weft splints, including the top splint which forms the rim and around which the warp splints are bent. Of these rows of weft splints, 32 are drawn out and looped into the projecting ornaments. The splints average 0.4 over the body of the basket, 0.2 at the base. The body is 16 high and 4.9 in diameter at the neck, which is a good measure of the greatest diameter of the body exclusive of the loops. The lid is 3 high exclusive of the 14-long grass-rope loop handle. The lid has a loop projection which slips over a weft splint loop to secure the lid to the body. It is likely that at one time the lid was bound to the body opposite the catch loop, but if so, the splint that bound it is now gone. The lid has eight warp splints averaging 0.5 at the rim, tapering almost to nothing in the center. There are 11 rows of weft splints, of which eight form projections. They average 0.4 in width. The basket is light-yellow-ocher in color.

REFERENCES CITED

FEDERAL WRITERS' PROJECT

1937. Maine, a guide 'Down East.' American Guide Series. Boston.

HODGE, FREDERICK WEBB (ed.)

1907. Handbook of American Indians north of Mexico. Smithsonian Inst., Bur. Amer. Ethnol., Bull. 30, pt. 1.

HOLLAND, WILLIAM J.

1901. Ann. rept. director for year ending March 31, 1901. Publ. Carnegie Mus. (ser. 10).

MASON, OTIS T.

1885. Basket-work of the North American aborigines. Ann. Rept. Regents Smithsonian Institution, for 1884 (pt. II).

MURDOCK, GEORGE P.

1953. Ethnographic bibliography of North America. Second edition. Behavior Science Bibliographies. New Haven, Human Relations Area Files.
1958. Outline of World Cultures. Behavior Science Outlines. New Haven, Human Relations Area Files Press.

SWANTON, JOHN R.

1952. The Indian Tribes of North America. Smithsonian Inst., Bur. Amer. Ethnol., Bull. 145.



Swauger, James L. 1966. "Abnaki Indian artifacts in Carnegie Museum." *Annals of the Carnegie Museum* 38, 117–127. <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.330860>.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/238349>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5962/p.330860>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/330860>

Holding Institution

Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Ernst Mayr Library

Sponsored by

Harvard University, Museum of Comparative Zoology, Ernst Mayr Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder.

Rights Holder: Carnegie Museum of Natural History

License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <http://biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.