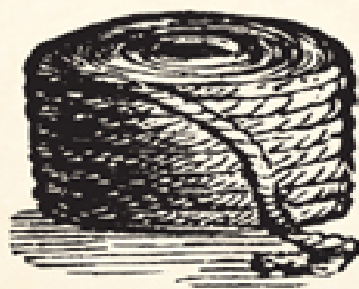


AMERICANA LIBRARY

# FOXFIRE

— *Household Crafts and Tips* —



Edited by

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FOXFIRE STUDENTS

# Household Crafts and Tips

The Foxfire Americana Library  
Edited by Foxfire Students



Anchor Books  
A Division of Random House, Inc.  
New York

FIRST ANCHOR BOOKS EDITION, APRIL 2011

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## A NOTE ABOUT THE FOXFIRE AMERICANA LIBRARY SERIES

For almost half a century, high school students in the Foxfire program in Rabun County, Georgia, have collected oral histories of their elders from the southern Appalachian region in an attempt to preserve a part of the rapidly vanishing heritage and dialect. The Foxfire Fund, Inc., has brought that philosophy of simple living to millions of readers, starting with the bestselling success of *The Foxfire Book* in the early 1970s. Their series of fifteen books and counting has taught creative self-sufficiency and has preserved the stories, crafts, and customs of the unique Appalachian culture for future generations.

Traditionally, books in the Foxfire series have included a little something for everyone in each and every volume. For the first time ever, through the creation of The Foxfire Americana Library, this forty-five-year collection of knowledge has been organized by subject. Whether down-home recipes or simple tips for both your household and garden, each book holds a wealth of tried-and-true information, all passed down by unforgettable people with unforgettable voices.

## SOAPMAKING

When we talked about having an article on making soap, I remembered my grandmother saying that she was going to make some to sell at the October Harvest Festival in Dillard, Georgia. I asked Ma if she would mind having an audience. She said she'd be glad to have us, so one day right after school four of us hit it up to Ma's to watch. I was glad to have someone excited about meeting Ma. I knew she was a great person, and now I had the chance to share my enthusiasm with someone else.

She was all smiles and ready to go when we arrived. After she had added all the ingredients, she let all of us take turns stirring the soap.

Ma thought some of our questions were pretty funny, like when we asked about it being too harsh to wash your skin in. She said she'd be proud to wash in it, and that it gets you as clean as "regular" soap. When we asked about putting perfume in the soap, I thought she'd never stop laughing.

When we left that evening, we not only had some pictures and a reel of tape, but also several bars of homemade soap.

ANDREA BURRELL

*The following photographs show Pearl Martin, Andrea's grandmother, demonstrating the steps involved in making soap with "store-bought" Red Devil Lye. The captions are actual portions of the tape recording made there.*



ILLUSTRATION 1 “You put two pints and a’half a’water and one can lye—Red Devil Lye—in your pot. You got to stir it til this dissolves good; then you got t’add th’grease to it. Then after you add th’grease, you got t’stir it for twenty minutes.

“Lye’s dissolved now. Grease, this is th’grease. You just have water and grease and th’lye. This is breakfast bacon grease. You can have anything. I had a man th’other day offered to give me mutton tallow. You know—to make it out of. I think I’ll take him up. I’ve always used hog grease myself—five or six pounds for this here.”



ILLUSTRATION 2 “This is beginnin’ t’ get thick now. Looks a lot like chicken gravy don’t it? I wish this’s a’ little darker because homemade soap’s always dark. Well, this is homemade soap, but it’s not like we used t’ make it because we used t’ drip th’ lye.”



ILLUSTRATION 3 Can you wash your clothes in it? “Yeah, you can. Just take that, y’ know, like we used to—we took our clothes and put our soap on ’em and rub ’em and boil ’em. People don’t do that now. And I ain’t afraid t’ wash my hands in it! That there lard kills th’ lye.” Why do you stir it so much? “It requires it. It wouldn’t make if you didn’t dissolve it good. You got t’ get it thick like jelly, y’ know. Y’ can’t leave jelly til it gets right.” (L-R: Elizabeth Rickman, Andrea, Emma Jean Buchanan, Mrs. Martin)



ILLUSTRATION 4 Did you ever add perfume to your soap? “I’ll tell you, we never did care. But you know, people nowadays like youn’s ages, youn’s thinks it’s something terrible, but we never did care. We just had t’old smellin’ lye soap. Now I could put some perfume in this, and it’d just be perfumed up like youn’s. I’ve got some t’put in it youn’s thinks it’d make it pretty. But we never did care. We always just made it and washed with it and we never thought nothin’ about it. But, of course, I guess lots of people nowadays thinks it’s fancy t’sell it that ways, don’t you guess? I believe I’ll try this just to see—*here she breaks up with laughter*—reckon it wouldn’t kill it no ways would it? If it’d do anything t’make it puny, you’d hate t’put it in there *laughing*.

“Youn’s want me t’put perfume in there? I can perfume it up for youn’s if you want. But I’ll tell you; if for me, I like t’smell that. It smells like old times. I’ve washed with homemade soap s’much—it smells like homemade soap.

“Now you’d think that’d get on your hands, but that doesn’t get on your hands at all t’amount t’anything. But ’course now, I wouldn’t want t’comb m’hair or do anything like that. I’d want’a wash a little. But, why you can wash your hair in that! It’ll bring th’ dirt out just as good as anything. You needn’t worry about takin’a’bath in that. It certainly won’t hurt you. I’ve took a’bath in it many a time. If I had’n’a known what lye soap was it’d scare me t’d death. You needn’t be scared of that though.

“Well, don’t you guess that’s about enough?” *At this point, she leaves the pot. She’ll stir it again in about half an hour; and then pour the thickened mixture into a shallow cake pan to harden overnight. When hard, she’ll cut it into blocks with a paring knife, lift the blocks out of the pan, and put them in a basket for sale later.*



ILLUSTRATION 5 “Daisy, when she went t’th’ Fair last year, she got some. She got a’ little piece—well, if you was t’ cut off a little slice there it’d be about like she got. Her hand was chapped or somethin’, and she got it t’ rub on her hands, and she give a quarter for her’n. I told ’em I couldn’t sell that. I cut that in two, I’d hate t’ ask a quarter fer’t.

“Well, of course, soap’s about a quarter now. Oscar got six cakes th’ other day. It’s a’ dollar and a quarter. That’s nearly twenty-five cents apiece wadn’t it? And them cakes, I measure them t’ that, and they a whole lot littler than that. Of course, they act like they nice soaps, you know it does.”

*The following excerpts from recent tape-recorded interviews explain the process involved in dripping your own lye.*

❖MRS. PEARL MARTIN: “We’d make soap whenever we got out. People using a fireplace—you had t’ clean your fireplace out pretty often, and when y’ got’y a gum full, you’s ready t’ go drippin’ it off.

“We used t’ put th’ ashes in a big wooden gum like that tree there, and it’d be holler. Then we’d drip that—just pour water on it and drip it, and then that’d be lye, y’ know. We usually used hickory ashes. It takes a whole big gum full.

“Th’ gum’s got t’ be way up on somethin’—settin’ up on somethin’—and it’s got t’ be up high. And you’ve got t’ drip that off and make your soap out of it. If you started that morning, you might get through by dinner; you might drip it and get it made in a day. It ’uz just like water—just poured like water, y’ know. That’uz water poured in there, and water come out, except it’uz brown lookin’: y’ know. You’d have t’ go once in a while and put

th'water to it t'get enough. Just let it drip 'til y'have enough t'make your soap with

“When y'make it with that lye you dripped, you've got t'keep a fire under it. You've got t'boil it—put it in a washpot and build a fire around it and boil it a whole long time because you've just got th'lye and th'grease, y'know, and you've really got t'boil it t'make it thick. It's just like jelly, y'know, before it's soap.

“Then pour't in a churn, you know, or somethin'other. Anything's tin rust'es.

“We'd use it ever how we had it. We used t'never have it hard. If you made just a little bunch, y'could get it hard, but if y'made a pretty good bunch, y'couldn't thicken it s'good.

“And then whenever we got out, we'd have t'make us some again.”

❖ MRS. ALGIE NORTON: “You have t'first build a hopper ([ILLUSTRATION 6](#)) with a spout to it—a little trough—and then put planks or boards up sloping again'it, and then y'put ashes in it, and put shucks down—or straw—in th'bottom t'keep th'ashes from goin' through. An' pour water on 'em, 'bout a gallon or two at a time 'til it gets t'drippin', and you set some kind of a container under th'spout t'catch th'lye.

“Then y'have a big washpot, and put it in that and get it t'boiling good. Put'cha in about ten or fifteen pounds of lard or any kind of grease. Then y'just keep a'pourin' your lye, lettin' it boil 'til it thickens down about like syrup, and that's what they used t'wash with ([ILLUSTRATION 7](#)).



ILLUSTRATION 6 A crude ash hopper, lined with paper and filled with hickory ashes, stands ready to work.



ILLUSTRATION 7 This large washpot, containing dripped lye and lard, has been heated to produce a soft soap.

“If y’wanted to, you could put any kind of perfumes or anything in it t’give it a good scent. And y’could take your mutton taller or beef taller if y’wanted to and use it in place of lard, and boil it down hard enough to cut out into blocks.



“Most of th’ time they dug out a trough out of a big log t’keep it, ’cause it’d eat anything up in a year or two if y’didn’t. And pour it in there and cover it up with a plank; and then y’dipped it out when y’wanted t’use it.”

❖ MRS. CARRIE DILLARD GARRISON: “You had t’save your ashes. We always burned hickory wood whenever we could. So when we got ready t’take up th’ ashes, we had a big barrel with both ends out of it, and we had it on a slanted board. We had a trough t’catch th’lye all ready. And we’d wet th’ ashes and put’em in a ash hopper and save’em.

“We usually waited until th’ spring of th’ year t’make our soap, and in th’ meantime, we’d save up all th’ old grease that happened t’accumulate around th’ place—pieces of taller, suet, things that we didn’t eat—and cook that out.

“And then we’d carry th’water—nobody ever had running water in those days—we’d carry th’ water and throw over th’ ashes and drip th’lye. Then we’d put th’grease and lye in a pot and boil it down ’til it got hard; and then we’d use that for soap.

“It sure would clean clothes too. Used t’stir it with a spicewood stick—I believe it was on th’new moon.”

❖ MRS. HARRIET ECHOLS: “We’d strip up these soft corn shucks and put in t’ticken th’soap.

“If they wanted, as they called it, flavored or perfumed soap, they got th’ little heart leaves from th’ woods where we find th’ little brown jugs in th’spring [ginger]—you remember. So that would make th’ flavored soap. They would take out some of this and put it in another vessel and put th’little heart leaves in t’flavor. Just let th’ heart leaves sit in th’soap; and when they cut it out, they pulled th’leaves out. That flavored th’soap—made it smell good.

“We used about two pounds of grease to a gallon of lye.”

## A QUILT IS SOMETHING HUMAN

The local Harvest Festival in the fall of 1969 provided ample proof that the interest in quilts has swelled. So teams of *Foxfire* editors began to gather the necessary facts. They attended quilting bees, copied patterns from quilts that had been hidden in trunks and attics for years, and, at the last minute, turned up the most elaborate Friendship Quilt any of us had ever seen ([ILLUSTRATION 8](#)).

Originally the plan was to find all those patterns that were native to this county. That soon proved to be impossible, for quilt patterns were like ballads—they moved constantly from community to community over surprisingly great distances. Media such as farmers' journals, newspaper columns, and even quilt pattern companies spread them farther. Even more complicating is the fact that patterns which were carried from the East with the first settlers in these mountains have been around so long that many of the owners consider them Rabun Gap patterns, which of course they are not. Worse, we have at least one pattern in hand that is known by at least three different names, and no one even guesses at where *it* came from.

At last it became obvious that the only solution was to include a sizable sampling of patterns from quilts that had been made in Rabun county by the mothers of grandmothers alive here now. And that's what we've done. Each of the twelve patterns drawn for this chapter by *Foxfire*'s Bill Roland has been known in this county for at least seventy-five years. We have not included some others that are equally authentic but are readily available in any of the numerous books on quilting patterns. These patterns include Wedding Ring, Double Wedding Ring, Attic Window, Monkey Wrench, Drunkard's Path, Dutch Doll (or Little Dutch Boy, Little Dutch Girl, etc.), Gate Latch, Four Doves at the Well, Double T, Lonely Star, Trip around the Mountain, Rocky Road, Basket, Nine Diamonds, and Odd Fellows.

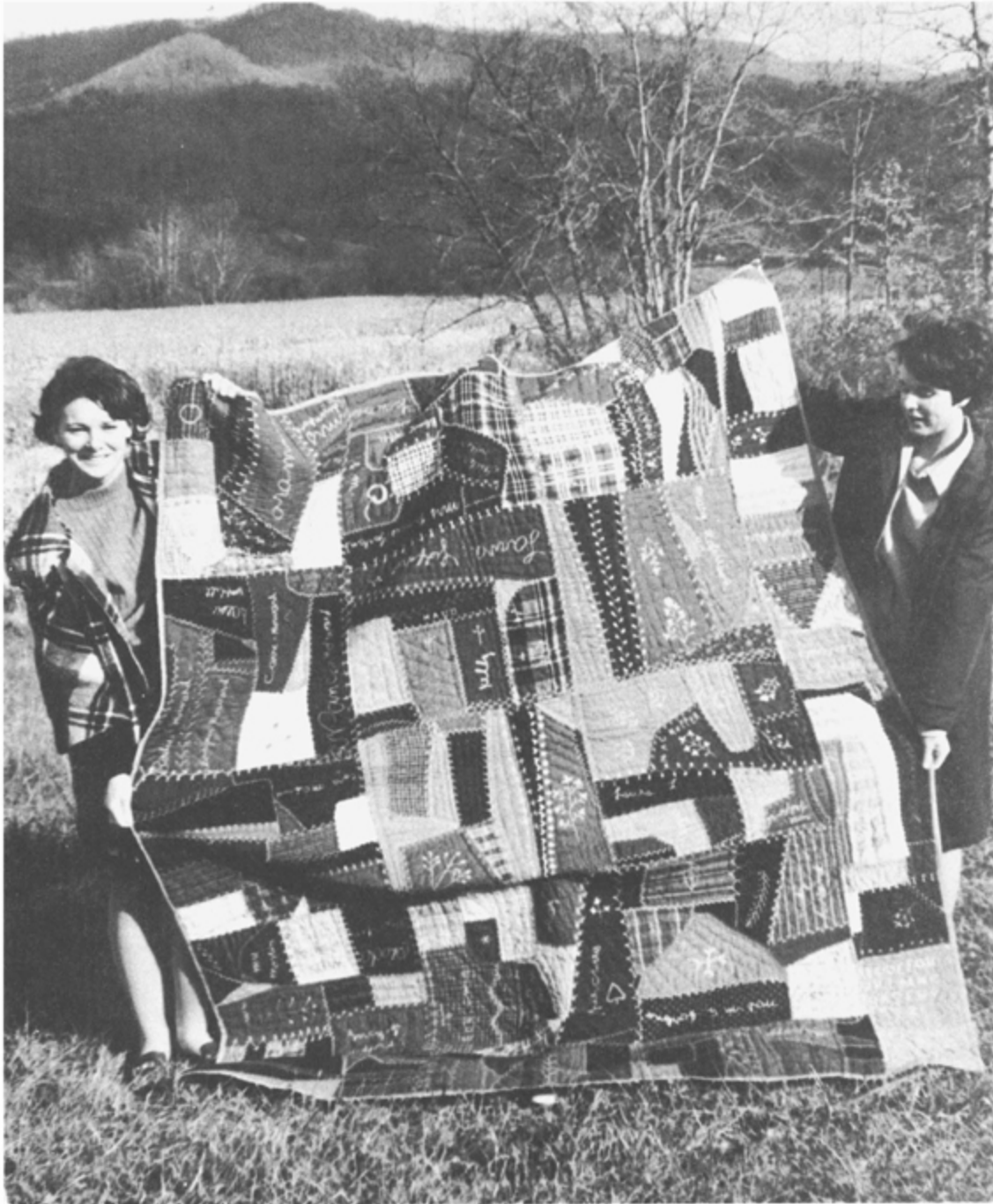


ILLUSTRATION 8 This Friendship Quilt held by Mary Garth and Frenda Wilborn is nearly a hundred years old and bears fifty-five names.

But why the dramatic revival of interest? One explanation might be the statement made recently by Mrs. Claude Darnell: “They’s lots of people that wants to go back to th’ old times.” That, perhaps, but more. The simple fact is that quilts were handmade by people for people. Every phase of their production was permeated by giving and sharing. From the trading of

scraps and patterns and the actual production in “bees” to the giving away of the final finished work, quilting was an essentially human activity. There is something about a quilt that says people, friendship, community, family, home, and love.

Aside from the quilting bees themselves, many customs and beliefs grew up around them. They were passed around, shown off, and given away. Patterns were traded like bubble gum cards. Especially beautiful ones became widely known. For example, Mrs. Grover Bradley told us in a recent interview, “Aunt Bede Norton had a basket pattern—just as pretty a basket as you ever saw; handle and all!” Grandmothers made at least one for each of their grandchildren to keep, and then pass on ([ILLUSTRATION 9](#)). A belief grew up that, “If a young girl slept under a new quilt, she would dream of th’boy she was going to marry.” And especially fines ones were used to cover the bed on Sundays (“Sunday Quilts”) and when company came. But by all counts, the most attractive custom must be that of the Friendship Quilt, discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Basically, the quilt itself was, and is, a pretty simple project. It consists usually of a bottom lining, a stuffing of cotton—or two to three pounds of home-grown wool—a top lining, and the top itself. But there the simplicity stops. The top was made of a number of separate squares joined either side to side, or separated from each other by cloth borders. Thus a quilt that measured sixty by eighty inches might take forty-eight 10-inch squares, sixteen 13-inch ones, or any of a number of other combinations. Each square was usually identical in pattern but distinctive in color. All the squares for one quilt might be made by the same person, or they might be made by a number of different individuals who later got together to produce the final work ([ILLUSTRATION 10](#)). Sizes varied according to the beds the quilts were to fit, or the requirements of the individuals for whom they were being made.



ILLUSTRATION 9 Algie Norton with a quilt she pieced for one of her grandchildren. She has made four quilts for each of her eight grandchildren, three for each of her great-grandchildren. (So far!)

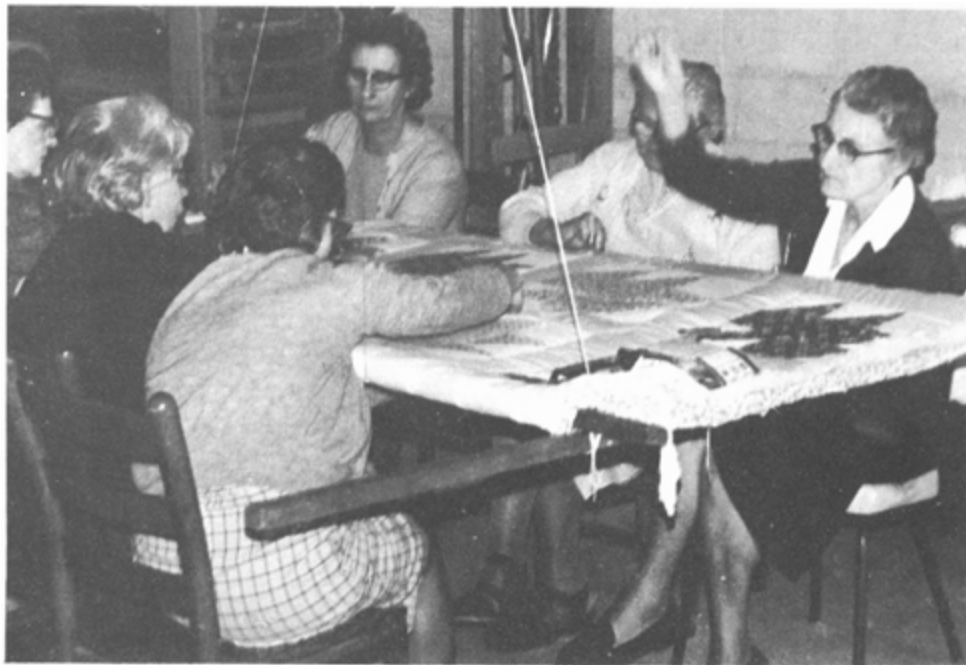
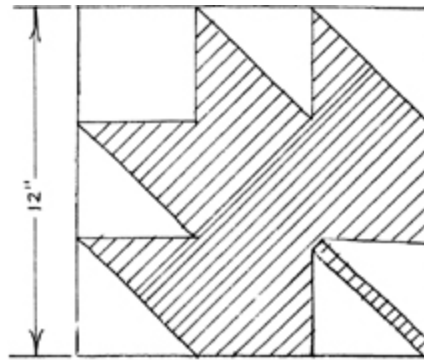
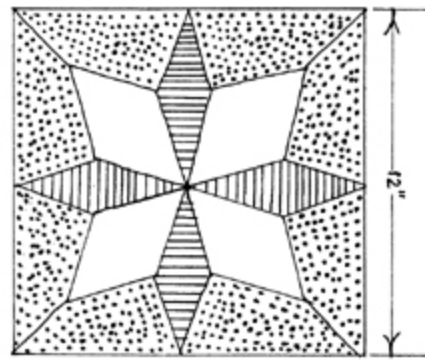


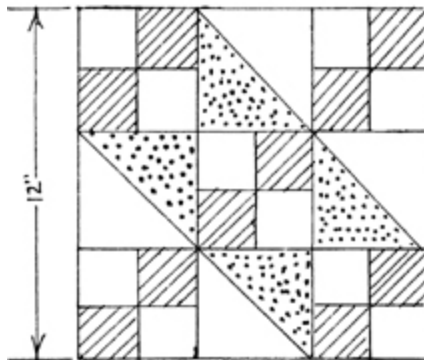
ILLUSTRATION 10 A quilting bee on Betty's Creek in Rabun Gap. The quilting frame is suspended from the ceiling. As each row is finished, it is rolled under to enable the ladies to get to the next one easily.



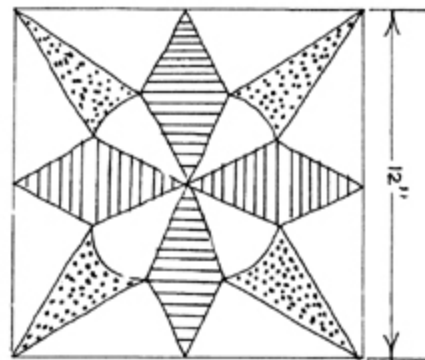
POPLAR LEAF



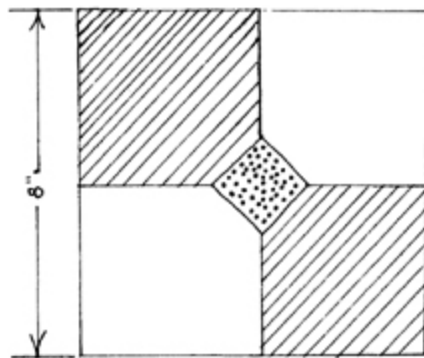
STAR



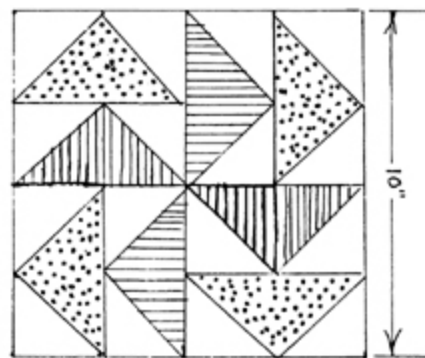
JACOB'S LADDER



STAR FLOWER



GENTLEMAN'S BOW TIE



DUTCH WINDMILL

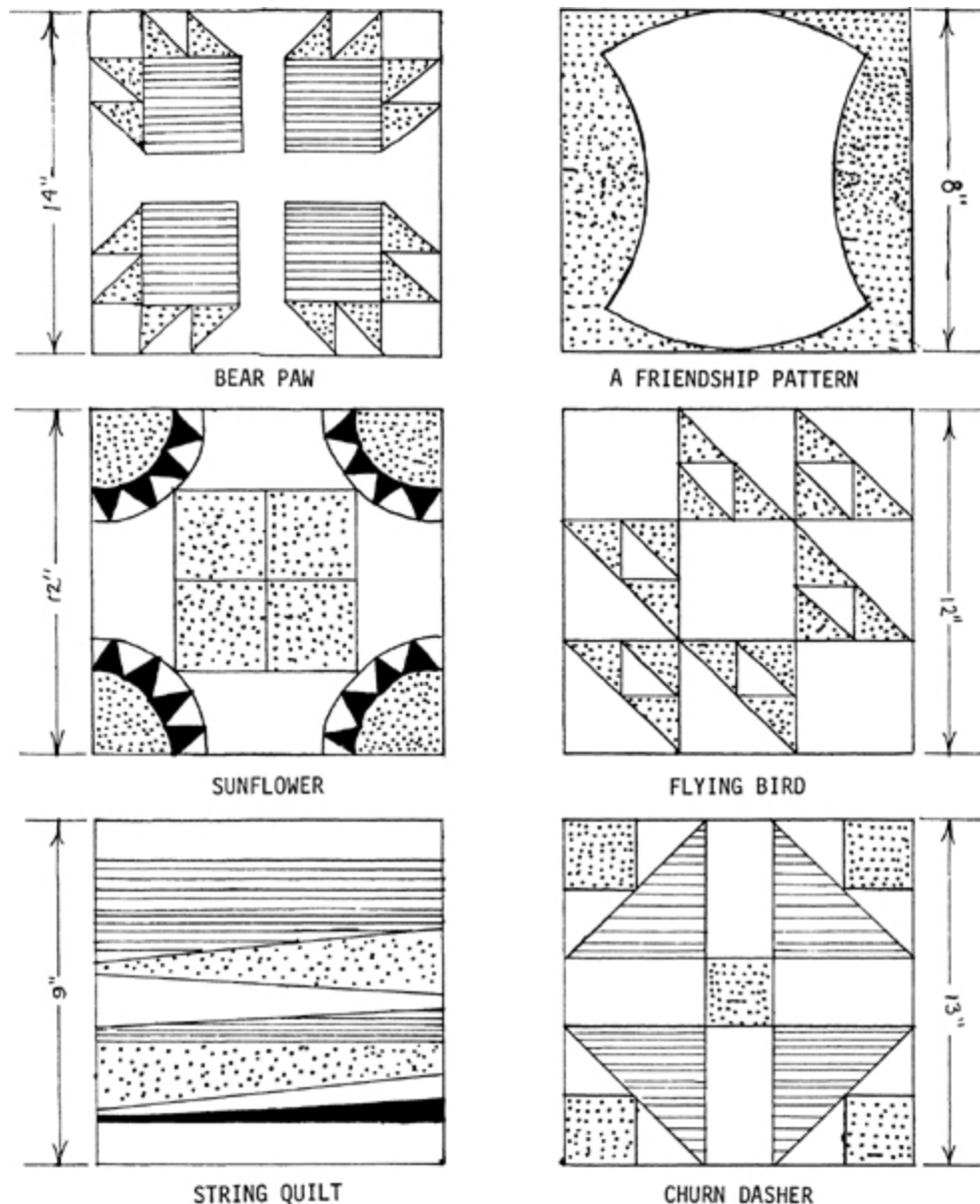


ILLUSTRATION 12

In addition, the patterns for the squares were as numerous as the quilts they embellished, as were the number of ways each pattern could be handled. With Poplar Leaf, for example, each leaf could be set so as to point in the same direction, or they could be set in groups of four to produce an elaborate four-square pattern. The same could be done with such patterns as Gentleman's Bow. String quilts, on the other hand, were simply scraps of cloth pieced together any way they could be made to fit. Sometimes they were strips set together, horizontally, in squares. With the Friendship Pattern, the ends of each strip interlock with the sides of two others.



There was even an array of styles in the actual stitching. Tiny stitches (“fancy quilts”) made it fluff up more and were the most popular. Larger ones made the job go faster. And the stitches themselves could be employed to make independent designs. Several different stitches are illustrated in [ILLUSTRATION 13](#).

Emma Jean Buchanan, one of *Foxfire*’s editors, was witness to the most popular way of putting a quilt together—the quilting bee. All the women who gathered at Maggie Vinson’s home had previously completed at least one Dutch Boy or Dutch Girl square. The squares had all been gathered up, and by the time the women arrived, they had been sewn together into the completed top. Mrs. Vinson had also set up the four-piece frame so that it rested on the backs of chairs, attached the bottom lining to it, and laid the cotton, top lining, and top over that. Everything was ready for the actual “quilting” to begin.

Emma Jean wrote down some of her reactions as she watched: “The women sit around the quilt laughing and joking as if it isn’t a job at all. They never seem to get tired or want to go home. They all seem so content. The gossip is flowing as if I weren’t even around.

“This is my first quilting, so I sit there in amusement not knowing what will happen next. As I watch them making the final stitches, I wonder, just why would these women spend their time quilting when it’s much cheaper to buy a blanket at the stores nearby? Might it be that they quilt just for the social enjoyment?”

When we asked Edith Darnell the same question, she said, “It helps bring people together where they’d have quiltin’. It just seems like lot’ a’pleasure. You’re quiltin’, you don’t know you’re quiltin’—a’talkin’ and a’quiltin’ too. And y’have lunch. I used t’ enjoy goin’ t’th’ quiltin’s.”

The most captivating custom, as mentioned earlier, was that of the Friendship Quilt. This was a quilt much like the others—it could be any pattern—with the added feature of a number of names embroidered on the squares themselves. Often each lady who had a part in the quilt embroidered her own name in the square she had contributed. As Mrs. Tom Kelly told us recently, “The girls had a custom of making Friendship Quilts. One person would piece a quilt block, and she’d give it to another girl, and keep on till she had enough blocks to make a quilt, and then all those girls would get together and quilt that quilt. And the one that started it around got the quilt. That was a very common thing in my girlhood days. The name of



everyone that pieced a square was supposed to be put on the quilt, and they valued them. It was a keepsake really.”

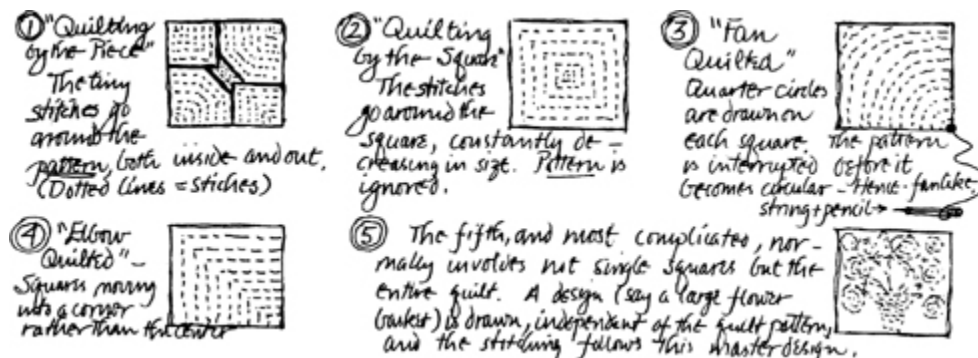


ILLUSTRATION 13

Such quilts were made by the ladies of the community whenever a young person from that community got married, when a neighbor lost his house by fire, for a newborn child in the neighborhood, or just for a keepsake. When a boy became a man, he sometimes received one too; Edith Darnell explained: “We made ’em along when th’boy’s about your age. You know, everyone sent out—their family’d send out—a square, and everybody’d piece one for it. Everywhere th’square went, everybody pieced one to go with it. When they got th’ quilt done, all that pieced th’square went and helped quilt it. Then they’d wrap that’n [the boy they had done the quilt for] up in th’quilt when they got it done.”

The quilt pictured at the beginning of this chapter is nearly one hundred years old. It was made of scraps gathered from friends and family, and it was pieced by one woman. After she had put the scraps together, she embroidered on each piece the name of the person from whom it had come. It bears fifty-five names. Not content with the names alone, however, she also “fancied” every single piece by completely surrounding it with embroidery ([ILLUSTRATION 14](#)). Apparently, she used every stitch known in this area, and made up some too. The result was the most elaborate piece of work any of us had ever seen. The fact that something that must have taken months could have come from an era when survival itself was difficult makes this quilt all the more astounding.

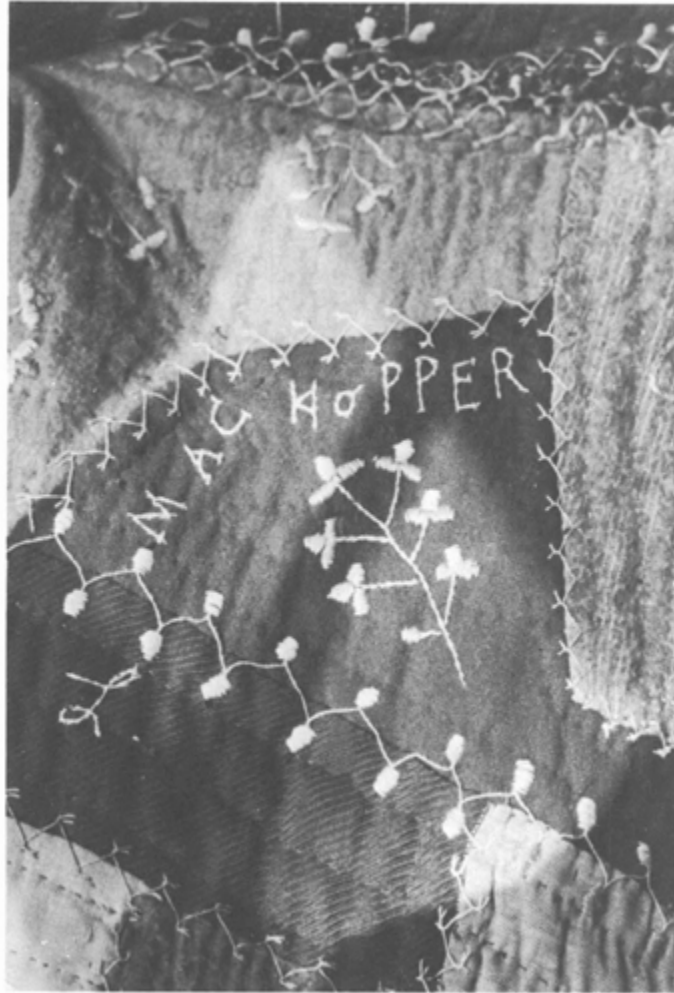


ILLUSTRATION 14 This detail from the Friendship Quilt pictured earlier shows one of the panels and the elaborate embroidery that surrounds it. The same kind of work was done around each piece in the quilt.

Fancy or plain, however, the fact remains that quilts seem to us symbolic of some of our finer human qualities. Perhaps this revival of interest is a hopeful sign for us all.

## MAKING A HAMPER OUT OF WHITE OAK SPLITS

Sitting on her front porch hammering away at the heavy white oak ribs, Beulah Perry looked as if she had been making baskets for a long time. Actually she had never made one before, but after years of watching her father, she knew just how to do it.

Even though I had known Beulah for over a year, she still amazed me with all her knowledge of the old times, and with her stories of how she and her family lived before there were stores in which to buy canned foods, cloth, and electric lamps.

Like many of the other people we interviewed, Beulah knows what it was like to have her closest neighbors five miles away, to have a cooked possum head as a reward for being good, and to get maybe a stick of peppermint when her father had a few extra pennies.

Her house is spotless. While she was showing us how to make the basket, she served us coffee and cake. Each person had a china cup and saucer—all different. When Jan and I helped her do the dishes afterwards, we were afraid she would think us bad housekeepers if we left anything undone and scrubbed the sink and cabinets with Comet. We were sure she did it every time!

I've learned tremendous respect for Beulah and all the others who shared similar hardships, if you can call them hardships at all. Their world certainly contrasts sharply with ours of TV, cars, and mothers who do all the work. We can't go back now, but we can listen to what they have to say and learn from it. That's one reason why we asked Beulah Perry to show us how to make a basket.

MARY GARTH



ILLUSTRATION 15 The hamper requires twenty-four heavy ribs, each about an inch wide. Crease each rib, while green, in two places, thus dividing it into three section, each twenty-two inches long (*left*). Here Beulah creases one rib. All knots and rough places should be hammered out so they will interfere with the weaving. Now the bottom of the basket is woven, using the ribs. The first ribs may be tacked down to help hold them in place until enough have been added so that the basket will stand alone (*right*).



ILLUSTRATION 16 Continue adding ribs, weaving the center section of each in an over one/under one pattern until ...

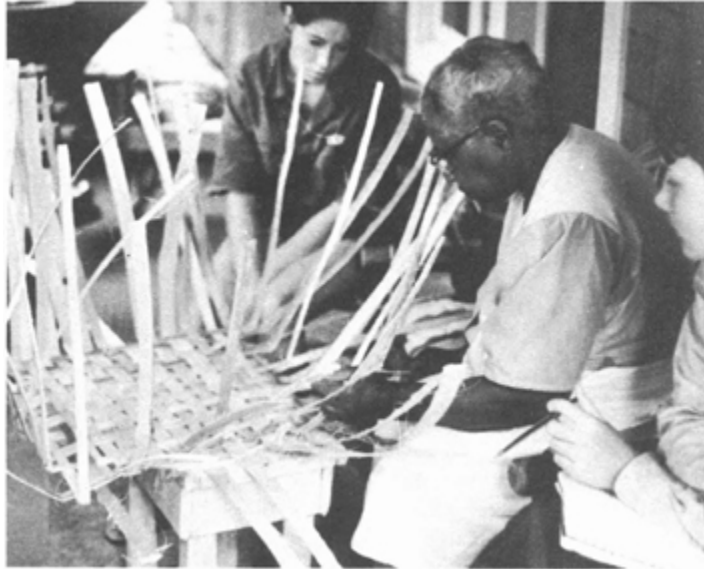


ILLUSTRATION 17 ... there are twelve ribs going in each direction, their center sections woven to form the basket's bottom.



ILLUSTRATION 18 Now, beginning at the bottom of the basket, and using thin, pliable splits, weave in and out of the ribs to make the sides. Keep the splits close together and fairly tight so that the sides will stand firm when the basket is done.



ILLUSTRATION 19 Continue weaving until the top is reached. This will take nearly all the splits you can make from two good oak saplings. When the end of one split is reached, simply lap a new one over the end of the old by about two inches and continue as before.



ILLUSTRATION 20 At the top, the ends of the ribs will probably be uneven. Before the rim can be made, these must be trimmed off straight. This can be done with a knife or, as shown here, with a pair of hedge clippers.



ILLUSTRATION 21 At the top, take two more splits and line the inside top edge with one and the outside top edge with the other. Holding them tightly in place, wrap a cord or a thin narrow split around them to make a good, tight rim. A handhole can be cut in either side, just under the rim, if you wish.

## MAKING A BASKET OUT OF WHITE OAK SPLITS

“I’ve been a’hopin’ and a’hopin’ I’d have company today. That just shows you if you wish and want somethin’ bad enough, God’ll usually bless y’with it.” With a delighted look on her wrinkled face, Aunt Arie greeted us early one hot summer day.

I first met Aunt Arie in June. My immediate reaction was one of shock. How could such a tiny, delicate woman, eighty-five years old maintain her own garden, do all her cooking and cleaning, make quilts every winter for her family and friends, and still manage to survive without luxuries? I didn’t wonder long. During the day, as Aunt Arie patiently taught us how to make white oak split baskets, I realized why Mike and Paul spoke of her with such affection. She is, to put it simply, just plain good. She is full of vitality and determination, and she radiates a warmth that few people have. Aunt Arie is really hard to explain. She’s downright likable and fun.

While we were making the basket, Aunt Arie talked of her childhood. Her eyes sparkled as she told us how she used to carry corn and eggs for miles in baskets like the one we were making.

At noon, she cooked dinner for us. Mary and I tried to help, but with an old wooden stove, black iron kettles, water drawn from the well, and general inexperience, we could do little more than watch Aunt Arie hustle about laughing gently at our mistakes.

With people like Aunt Arie and Beulah Perry, this work has been very rewarding for me. I’ve learned not only the skills required to make baskets, but also the value of sincere friendliness, honesty, and hard work—and that may be the most important lesson of all.

JAN BROWN





ILLUSTRATION 22 Tommy Wilson and Butch Darnell begin by whittling ten ribs for the basket out of heavy, quarter-inch thick splits. The ribs should be about a half inch wide, pointed on both ends, and long enough to reach around half of the basket.



ILLUSTRATION 23 Next, construct two hoops of approximately equal circumference out of four- to seven-foot heavy splits, depending on the size of the basket you want. Place one inside the other and nail them together at their intersecting points.

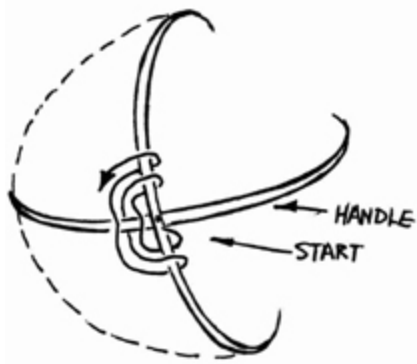


ILLUSTRATION 24 The weaving is done with thin green splints. It is a simple repeating pattern, as shown here (*left*). Work from both hoop intersection points simultaneously so your weaving will meet in the middle of the basket (see [ILLUSTRATION 28](#) and [29](#)). The weaving begins where the loops intersect. The following two plates illustrate the first two steps (*right*).



ILLUSTRATION 25



ILLUSTRATION 26 When one split runs out, tuck in its end, insert the point of another into the weave, and continue (*left*). When the weaving is progressing well at both hoop intersection points, insert the first two ribs. Simply force their sharpened ends into the weave (*right*).



ILLUSTRATION 27 The first rib in place (arrow) (*left*). Continue weaving as before (*right*) ...



ILLUSTRATION 28 ... inserting ribs until there are five on either side of and parallel to the main hoop (*left*). Here, the basket is well over half completed. All the ribs have been worked in (*right*).



ILLUSTRATION 29 The finished product.

## PURPLE MARTIN GOURDS

People in years back put up martin houses to entice the martins to stay on their place during the summer to chase off chicken hawks. Bryant McClure told us: “My mother had purple martins long ago and they were not for catching insects, but to keep the hawks away from the chickens. They’ll fight them. They’ll fight a crow. If a hawk comes around, these purple martins will gang up on him. They’ll chase him out of the country.”

The primary reason people erect purple martin gourds or apartments now is to keep flying insects away from their gardens and from around the house. People who have them say they can sit outside late in the evening in the summer and not be bothered by mosquitoes or gnats.

Lester Davis says, “I guess the martins help me a lot because they eat all the bugs and insects. Martins will cover a large area eating insects, mostly mosquitoes. They’ll be up in the elements all day long until nearly sundown. You can see them dive like a jet airplane. A lot of people like martins, especially around ponds.”

To prepare a gourd for a martin house, a large round gourd with a short neck should be used. A round hole, two inches in diameter, should be made in the side of the gourd. Then small holes should be drilled in the bottom so that rain water will drain out. Drill two small holes through the neck of the gourd for a wire to be run through to hang the gourd by.

Mr. McClure told us how he got started with his martin houses. “When I decided I wanted to get purple martins, I bought an expensive setup—apartments, aluminum pole, and all that. I guess for two years I didn’t get a martin. Two came and sat on the little deck, but flew away and never came back. I asked Bob Hooper what went wrong, and he said, ‘You’ve got to have gourds.’ Gourds must be their natural houses. I got gourds. I sent to Georgia and paid seventy-five cents apiece for them. I put them up and the next year I got martins.

*Articles needed:*

*One galvanized pipe – 20–21 feet long; one and one-half to two inch diameter*

*One galvanized pipe – 3–4 feet long; two to two and one-half inch diameter*

Two crossarms – 2×4; seven to eight feet long.  
 Ten to twenty gourds  
 Bag of cement

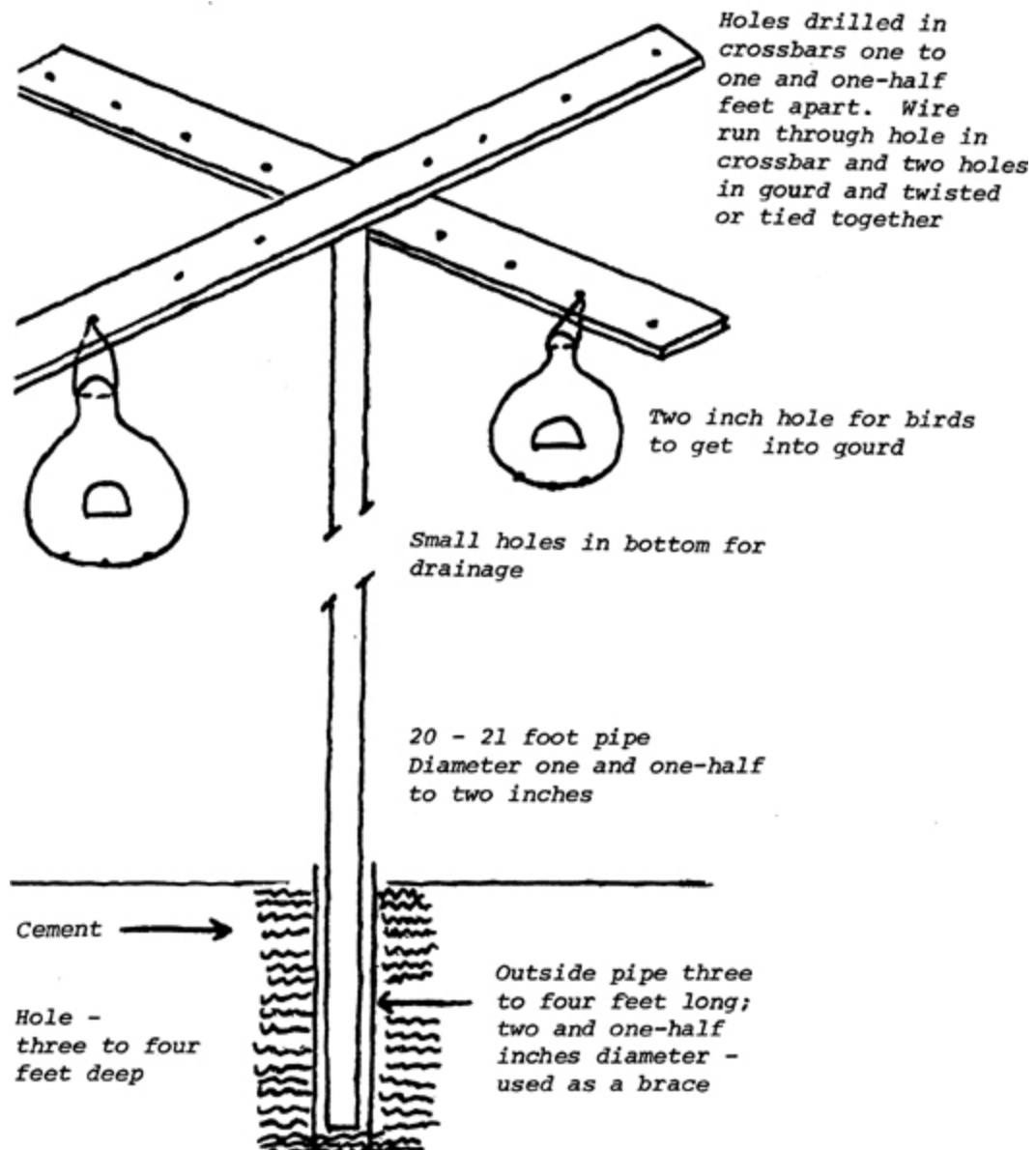


ILLUSTRATION 30



ILLUSTRATION 31

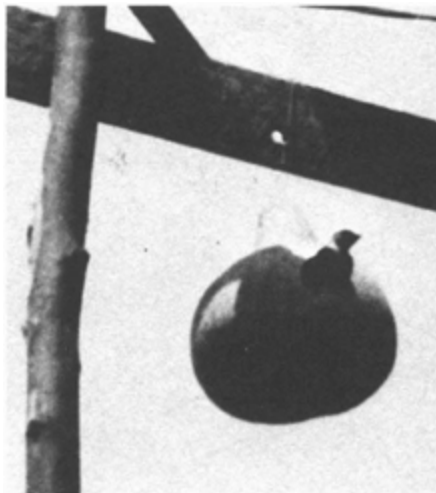
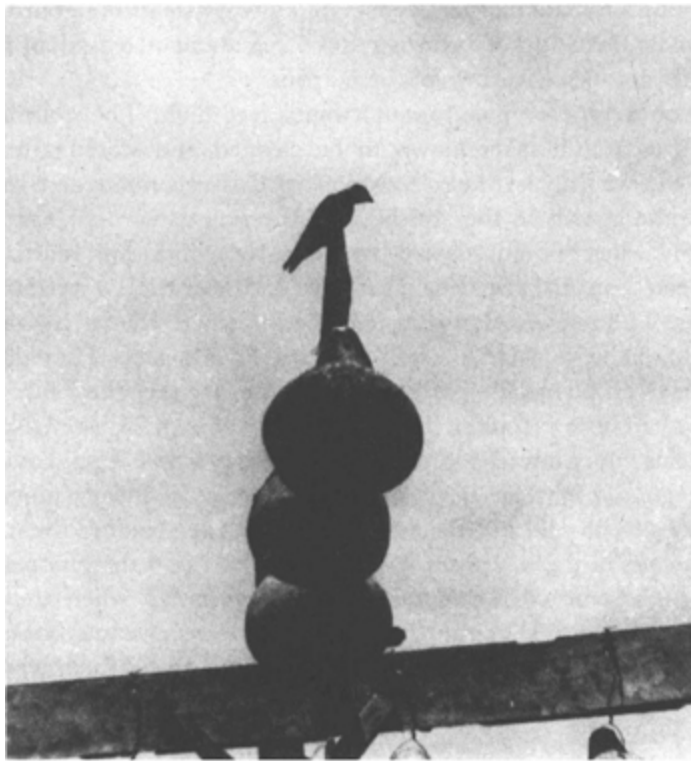


ILLUSTRATION 32



ILLUSTRATION 33





Mr. Davis told us that he raised his own gourds. Ask for seeds for martin gourds. [NOTE: We have recently received word that seed companies like George W. Park Seed Company, Inc., and Hastings Seed Company sell not only dipper gourd seed, but also a special variety ideal for martin houses.] “I don’t have any trouble. I like to plant my gourds in fairly rich soil where they’ll grow good. I want to get a good growth. I plant my rows about twelve feet apart and my hills in the rows about twelve feet apart. I’ll take my shovel and dig a square about three or four feet out, fill it with fertilizer and rake it nice and smooth. I plant my seed in that in early spring.” Mr. Hooper suggested a mesh fence for the vines to grow up on, so that the gourds could hang down. This helps them to grow straight. Don’t pick the gourds off the vines. Let the vines die, and after the first frost, turn the gourds over so that they will dry out on both sides. Pull them off the vines after they are completely dry and hard—about December or January. Then they are ready for holes to be drilled in them and the seeds cleaned out of the inside of the gourds. Both these men save their seeds from year to year. Then they select the year’s crop of shortnecked, big, round gourds. Gourds may be reused from year to year, but as they get battered, replacements are necessary.

“In preparing houses for the martins, you should always clean the gourds out and put sulfur in them to keep down mites ... about a teaspoonful to each gourd. Mites get in the feathers of the martins.”

Put the gourds on a pipe or pole, about twenty feet high. The gourds are put up in February and taken down to be cleaned and stored after the martins leave in late July or August. Nylon cord is recommended by Bob Hooper to tie the gourds to the crossbars on the pole [see [ILLUSTRATION 30](#)], as wire breaks easily when the gourds are blown by the wind. The martin houses must be erected out in a field or clear area in the yard, away from trees and buildings. The martins don’t want to be anywhere that a cat or snake could get to their nests. Martins won’t even light in a tree. They do not present the usual problem of birds near the house because they carry their droppings away in little capsules.

Mr. Hooper told us many interesting things about the martins. They have several poles with gourds in their back yard and sit out in the evenings watching the martins fly in and put their babies to bed after feeding them.

They wake the Hoopers in the mornings with their chatter, and the Hooper family feels as though some of their children have left home when they depart in August. We asked if they thought the same ones ever came back, and they said that they really do think so. They seem to know their way around so well. Mrs. Hooper said that when she hangs clothes on the line, they perch on the electric wires and chatter. When she goes in, they fly off until she or some other member of the family come back out in the yard. They they come back to visit again.

About the only time they light on the ground is when they are building their nests and then only to pick up leaves and twigs. They like to line their nests with green leaves to keep the nest cool. They will come down for crushed eggshells if you put them out on the ground in the open. That is about the only thing you can feed them off the ground. They do most of their feeding in the air, low to the ground in the mornings and climbing higher all day long, then back near the ground in the evenings.

The martins send out scouts in early March. They can be seen around for two or three days. Then they leave and after several weeks, the scouts come back with others. By the twenty-fifth of March, about ten pairs will be around a set of gourds. Each pair usually likes to occupy two gourds—one for the parents and one for the young. They stay only long enough for their young to hatch and be able to fly. It takes about three weeks for them to hatch, and they start building the nests about the first of May.

The purple martin is about the size of a dove in the air. If the sun shines just right on the male, he is purple. Mr. McClure says that one morning you wake up and realize the martins are gone. It's such a lonely feeling. There is no way to keep them here after late July. They stay just long enough to raise their young; then they go back to South America until the next spring.

BARBARA TAYLOR, ANNETTE REEMS

*Photos by Tom Carlton.*

## DIPPER GOURDS

In the past, many people found that the gourd could be used in different and useful ways. They used gourds to make holders for women's sewing notions, to store lye soap after it was made, and as small types of bowls or dishes for decoration or to put odds and ends in. One of the best uses of the gourd was as a dipper at the well or in the house for drinking purposes.

The scientific name for a dipper gourd is *Cucuribita foetidissima* (perennis) and a couple of its common names are calabash and siphon gourd.

Not very long ago Suzy set up an interview with Lawton Brooks who grows his own gourds and had said he would cut us out a dipper gourd when we came. I was really glad I was involved with what went on that afternoon; the main reason being that it was my first visit to Florence and Lawton's, and I just enjoyed spending that part of the day with them. When Suzy and I arrived there, we talked awhile as Suzy has known them for a long time. Then we discussed the process of growing gourds. We went on out on the front porch while Lawton talked and made the gourd into a dipper. In an hour or so, we ended up with the gourd finished and ready to be used for drinking.

ROY DICKERSON

LAWTON: Gourds're a thing that has to be planted early, but if frost touches them, it'll kill'em. You've got to get a gourd planted early. Now the way I get mine, and the best way I think to do this is to plant'em the last of March in pots. And then they come up in them pots; well, when they come up, they'll just grow up a long stem in the shade and two little ol' leaves will grow up about [six inches] high. But just let'em alone and then you take them out there and you can transplant them. You can set'em out wherever you want to, when you think there ain't going to be any more danger of frost. Now down at [Suzy's] place, you've got a perfect place 'cause you're nearly at the frost line. It wouldn't hit that way like here in these low places, 'cause you're just about above the frost line. And if you get down there, you can grow'em; you've just got to grow some next year.

I'm gonna pot a bunch of 'em for you. Pick you a good place and I'll come help you put up your wires; I'll get your wire. You just furnish the place, and me and you'll grow us a bunch of gourds.



ILLUSTRATION 35 Lawton Brooks offered to show us how to make a dipper out of a gourd.



ILLUSTRATION 36 The gourds themselves ripening on a fence in Happy Dowdle's back yard.



ILLUSTRATION 37 Lawton first chooses where the hole is to be cut, and then rings the spot with a pencil line.



ILLUSTRATION 38 Starting in the center of the penciled circle, he begins to cut through the gourd's shell with his pocketknife.



ILLUSTRATION 39 Slowly he trims down to the line itself.



ILLUSTRATION 40 Next he scrapes out the spongy inside and the seeds, and saves the seeds to plant next spring.



ILLUSTRATION 41 Then he trims up the edge ...



ILLUSTRATION 42 ... files it smooth ...



ILLUSTRATION 43 ... and goes to the sink to try it out.

They like a pretty good soil. They like a little clay in their soil but they need pretty good soil to grow. Manure's good [for fertilizer]; just regular ol' stable stuff.

They have to have support to [grow specifically into a dipper gourd]. If they lay on the ground, they're liable to grow in just any direction. [A fence for support] wouldn't have to be too high if you just keep the vine up on the



fence. You know how they took to my clothesline up here—they'll just go from one to another, and they'll get around. [The gourds] just tie themselves to a fence or anything they can climb. Wherever the vine touches, it attaches itself. Then it goes a little further and ties itself again. You'll have to break them loose, because they've done tied themselves—the wind won't blow'em down.

Sometimes a vine will blight, but not bad enough to hurt. I've never had any insects bother me. If them ol' gourds stay there and they mash down into the ground, the seeds will come up in another year volunteer. They'll mix if you get'em too close to the cucumbers—it'll be so bitter you can't eat'em. Now I tried that out. I had my gourds on the lower part of my fence. And my cucumbers were way up here, but the vine runs down that way, y'know, and they didn't go all the way to the gourds. Anyway, we couldn't use them cucumbers; they was the most bitter things I ever ate. They was the prettiest cucumbers, but we couldn't eat'em. They were so bitter we just let them lay there. It didn't bother the gourds. It'll make the cucumbers bitter-like; cross pollination is why it happened. I don't know about squash; I never tried them.

You ought not to plant [the gourds] any closer than six foot apart. That gives them a chance to go one way and the other, or cross over each other. [Just plant them] along the edge of the fence; they'll take a runner and go by and hit something, anything, and climb it. Now this man that raised them in Atlanta gave me this gourd here. He planted one by his woodshed and out in a field he laid him a pole in the fork of the apple tree, and that thing went right on up the apple tree and crossed over to the other one and filled'em both up. They was hanging that close together. By gosh, I bet my pick-up [truck] could of been filled up twice. That's the prettiest sight I ever seen in my life from that vine. That goes to show you there would have been about a thousand if it all would have been counted. So you can't tell how many you'll have; it's according to how they get started, and how they turn out, and the season they get planted.

It takes them a long while to mature and get ready for the frost; frost keeps'em from rotting. Just let them hang till it frosts on them, or two or three good frosts. That hardens their shell better. Now [that man in Atlanta] hadn't picked his [gourds] till 'long in the winter and them apple trees was hanging full.

Leave about three inches shank [when you pick them]; break it off near the vine and leave the rest on the gourd. When you pick'em, you should set'em in a dry, cool place, in the air. Let them settle one or two months, and the seeds get hard and everything. They should be dry enough to rattle. When he gets dried out good and hard, then you can make your dippers. They're green growing, but turn kind of yellow when mature.

There's a type gourd they call a martin gourd. This is for the martin bird. They've got another great big one they call a half-bushel gourd. They grow more like a pumpkin. The old folks used to use'em around the house to put something in them for a waste basket or a sewing basket. They'd use the big gourd for it. Just cut the top off and clean'em out. It makes a good one; they'd last from now on. Just like a dipper would last from now on. Old people, when they made their lye soap, they'd use them to make their soap in and store it. And they've got a blamed gourd they make a dish out of. It grows kinda like a dish and it's got a ring around it. You cut out the ring and that ring makes a lid.

## BROOMS AND BRUSHES

### THE MONROE LEDFORD VARIETY

Through Maco Crafts in Franklin, North Carolina, we were introduced to Monroe Ledford, a delightful person who has raised broomcorn and made brooms for several years as a hobby. He uses the same technique as his parents and grandparents used. He will be retiring soon from road construction and plans to make brooms to supplement his retirement income.

As we drove up in the Ledfords' yard, we noticed bunches of sticks in neat piles, lumber near a workshop, and a shock of corn nearby. Off to the side of the house were woods, where Mr. Ledford showed us sourwood saplings that he prefers to use for broom handles.

Beyond the house, down the hill a short way, was his broomcorn field—about two acres. As we were visiting him in February, the field was bare, but we're hoping to go back in August and see the broomcorn in full growth.

Mr. Ledford makes his brooms in the garage adjoining his house. There on the rafters, he has all kinds of sticks to choose from for broom handles and walking sticks. He has his broom straw spread out on timbers in one corner to keep it dry and flat, and convenient to choose from as he makes each broom.

*Interview and photographs by Ken Kistner, Phil Hamilton, and Lanier Watt.*



ILLUSTRATION 44 Monroe Ledford and his brooms.



ILLUSTRATION 45 Broomcorn

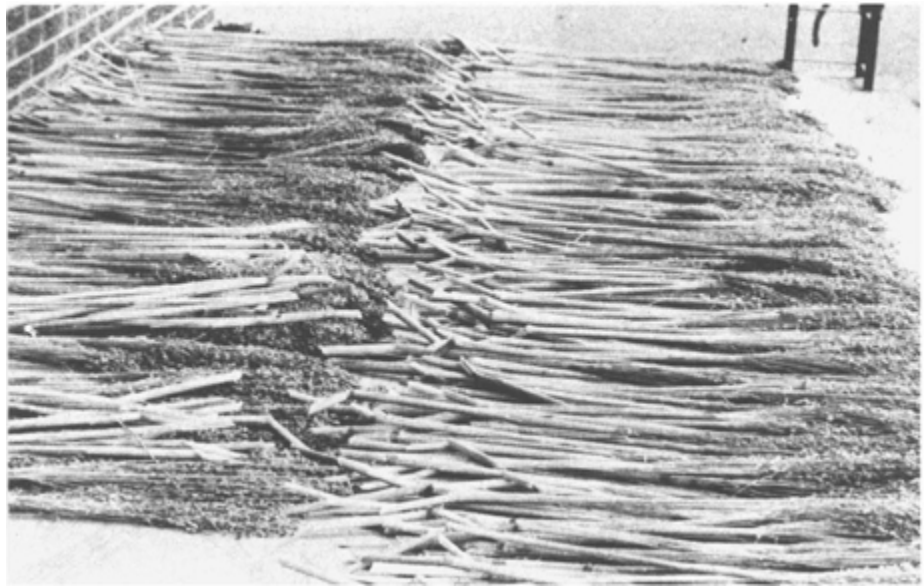


ILLUSTRATION 46 The harvested straw drying.



ILLUSTRATION 47 First the seeds are combed out of the tassel or head. Seeds that are not saved for planting the next year are simply plowed under in a nearby pasture.

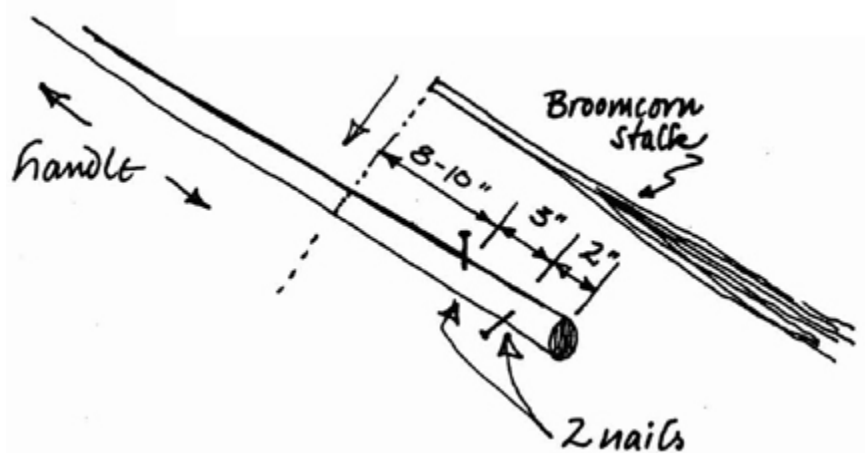


ILLUSTRATION 48 Set two small nails in the handle to prevent the stalks from slipping off after they have been tied in place.



ILLUSTRATION 49 Surround the end of the handle completely with one layer of stalks.



ILLUSTRATION 50 Tie them down in two places with strips of cloth or string. With a knife, shave off or taper the ends of this first layer of stalks to reduce bulk.

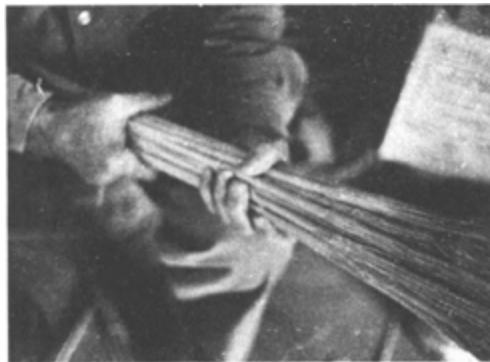


ILLUSTRATION 51 Then add a second layer of stalks and tie them in place temporarily.

I started to make brooms just for a hobby, that's all. Just thought I'd make a few brooms, and if somebody wanted them, I would have them to give. And that's what I did, till I gave away two or three hundred dollars' worth. The most expensive part of the broom is your time. This little ball of

twine that I'm weaving with costs 75¢. It'll make five or six brooms, maybe more.

They make a nylon cord that won't break, but it's not good to use for weaving brooms because it won't hold—it's too slippery. You can't keep nylon cord tight. The cord I use is made of cotton; it doesn't stretch.

I use a type of carpet needle—bowed a bit so that it goes in and out of the stalks easy enough when you're weaving the string through. It probably costs about 35¢ at the dime store in Franklin.

About the first of June, I prepare my soil and plant the broomcorn; it's just like planting corn or sorghum. Only I plant it a lot thicker. Broomcorn [can be planted] about every five inches apart. I guess if your ground is good enough, you probably wouldn't have to use much fertilizer. It's not too hard to grow. An acre of broomcorn will make lots of brooms.

I save most of my seed for the next year. I don't imagine any stores around here would handle the kind of seed I use. Now that's something I've never done—gone to a store for seed. I guess you could order them from a seed book somewhere.





ILLUSTRATION 52 Lay the broom on a cement floor or in a long trough of some type. Cover it with a burlap sack and pour scalding water over the broom to soften the stalks so that they will be pliable enough to stitch through them. Leave them under the wet sack about ten to fifteen minutes. String will now be tied tightly around the broom to hold the stalks in place permanently. To do this, Mr. Ledford uses an apparatus of the same type used by his parents' generation. Hang a rope from a rafter; it must be long enough to allow a loop at the bottom for the broom maker's foot, four to six inches above the floor. Wrap the rope once around the broom near the point where it will be tied. Push down on the rope with your foot to tighten the loop around the broom. Twisting the broom upward will tighten the loop more.



ILLUSTRATION 53 When it seems quite tight, take a five- or six-foot piece of heavy-duty cotton string threaded through a carpet needle. Run this through the center of the brush right below the point at which the stalks stop and the brush begins (*top*). The needle will have to be pulled through with pliers. Then bring the needle out and twist string all the way around the broom and tie very tightly. As the broom straw dries, it will expand around the string, tightening it further. Twist the loose end of the string so that it goes into the center of the broom and will not be seen (*bottom left*). If you want to weave the stalks instead of simply ringing them in four places, start weaving the string from the brush and weave toward the bare handle in a standard over one, under one pattern. If you end up needing to weave two stalks at one time to keep the pattern, go ahead (*bottom right*). Mr. Ledford says he has tried to put an odd number of stalks around, but it rarely works out that way, so he doesn't worry about it any more. He just catches up two stalks if he needs to.



ILLUSTRATION 54 To finish up, put the broom back in the loop of the rope apparatus near the top of the stalks and tighten. Tie the string very tightly at the top to finish off the weaving. The excess string may be used to make a loop there to hang the broom by the fireplace. Trim off the excess stalk at the top of the string. Leave a string or rag wrapped around the lower part of the broom to keep the brush from spreading until the broom is hung by the fireplace or wherever it will be kept.



ILLUSTRATION 55 Several handle designs are common. The style chosen depended on personal preference.

About eight years ago, a neighbor gave me a handful of broomcorn seed. I never thought to ask them where they got the seed. I planted them and

that's how I got started in the broom business. About ten or fifteen years ago, my stepmother gave me some seed—I don't know where she got them, South Carolina, maybe—and I grew the corn to make that broom there [standing in the corner of the garage]. I had enough corn for several brooms, but I was busy, and just made that one and left the rest to lie around and ruin.

September is when I start cutting it—before frost—when the head begins to be pretty well filled out, while the seeds are still green. This happens before you know it. Then I go and break the stalk about three feet below the top, and let that hang down. This helps the brush to stay straight. If the stalk is not broken over like this, the straw becomes too heavy with seeds and begins to fall down and turn the wrong way.

So that's the first thing I do. After a few days I cut it. Broomcorn should be cut while still green. It makes tougher brooms this way.

You want to leave it out to cure, but you must be careful not to let it get rained on too much; it mildews and deteriorates pretty quickly while it's green. I don't like to leave it out in the field after it's cut; I'd rather not have it rained on. I like to keep it dry and just put it out in the sun each day—it's got to have sunshine to cure.

Some people like a red-colored broom. If the broomcorn is not harvested, or cut, until after it is completely ripe, the straw will be red. The straw is more brittle, and the broom not quite so durable, as one made with broomcorn cut before it is fully ripe, but for some people this is suitable because the broom will be used for ornamentation more than utility.

After I cure it, I cut the stalks in the shape I want them. I cut them at an angle or split off part of the stalk to reduce bulk around the handle of the broom.

I comb the seeds of the straw with a child's saw that one of my grandsons had left around here. Any kind of sharp-toothed tool could be used, just to rake out the seeds and fluff up the straw.

My brooms are generally three and a half to four feet long from the top of the stick down to the end of the brush. I have to pick out stalks that match, that are pretty much the same length. Sometimes I put the best corn inside just to get the right length to match around the outside. Sometimes I put the big, long brushes inside; the bigger and longer the brush, the tougher and better broom you've got, you know.

Then they're ready to place on the broomstick. Now what they call a hearth broom, if I understand it right, is just stalks—no broomstick. Although some people do put a small stick in them, long stalks of broomcorn can be used and just bunched together and the stalks woven as for a regular broom. Just use long stalks, and use the stalk handle to hold it. It's the same length as those longer stalks that aren't split. Well, to make a hearth broom, I do split part of them that won't show, and then leave the ones on the outside unsplit.

### **THE AUNT CELIA WOOD VARIETY**

“How does it feel to be one hundred years old?” was one of the first questions we asked Aunt Celia Wood. “Well, not much different from ninety-nine,” was all the answer we got.

Aunt Celia is our oldest contact, and even at one hundred she still keeps her house spotless. She also makes her own brooms out of broom sage and twine. As she showed us how, she talked of various things. She has definite opinions on many current subjects, and we were fascinated by her spirited comments on such things as politics and religion.



ILLUSTRATION 56

**On Going to the Moon:** I don't believe there is no such business. When God made this world, he gave man authority t'subdue [animals]. Gave control over fowls, beasts, fish. Well, God left space for himself. He's got th'sun, moon, stars. Man ain't got no business a'foolin' with'em.

**On Politics:** They's a lot of things goin' on that oughtn't. Hit's th'leaders of th'country. Congress, and th'President said America was sick. Doctor it! Congress is treatin' America like a doctor who don't know what he's a'doin'.

[When women got the right to vote] I registered. I voted several years. I didn't care whether I did or not, but my husband wanted me t'register and vote. Said th'other women was all a'doin' that, and most of'em did. I wish they hadn't, 'cause they gave'em that privilege and now they're a'tryin' t'take over. I don't like that—even if I am a woman. I think that's men's work. 'Course they're makin' a right smart mess out of it. Maybe if th'women had it all they *might* do better.

**On Religion:** Well, I couldn't live without it. When I'uz thirteen years old, I joined th'Baptist church. I've been a Baptist ever since. I don't fall out with th'other denominations because hit's not th'church that saves'y'. Don't do you any good t'join th'church if you ain't saved.

I'm a'lookin' forward to a better time than I've got. I've enjoyed life. I've had a lot a'sorrow. I'd a'never went through it all if it hadn't a'been for th'Lord.

My parents treated us strict. There were parties. We never went to 'em. My daddy said dances would lead you wrong. They trained me that they was a Lord over us all. And they'd read th'Bible to us every night. Had a big fireplace. I can see m'old daddy. After supper he'd throw in a piece a'pine wood, lean his chair back, and read th'Bible to us. I wuz th'oldest. Then he'd get his songbook and they'd set there and sing. We enjoyed it. We knowed t'behave. I think that has a lot t'do with our young people. Young people get into mischief, but you'll think about what daddy and mommy said.

I was married eighty-six years. I didn't have no children, but I've always had children around me. I always tried t'give th'boys good advice. I got after a boy one day. I'uz a'settin' here, and he cussed. I says, "I'm not a'gonna' have anybody around me that cusses." I told all of'em that. They never did cuss any more around me. And I had that boy tell me after he

married that if it hadn't a'been for my advice, he didn't know what he'd a'made.

I'uz inst a'studvin' about that—advice to a person inst startin' out. t'her. I advised her. I asked her what church she belonged to just t'start it off, y'know. I said t'her, "Ain't y'never been saved?"

She said, "No."

I told her, "You're married now, and most ever'body is apt t'have some children," and I says, "Y'can't raise up your children right without th'Lord. When y'go in yer new house, y'ought t'take th'Lord with you." I told her that.

All my boys was church members. But one day I found a deck a'cards in a drawer. But I never said a word. So one night after supper, he said, "Let's have a game."

I said, "Lamar, I don't know how."

He said, "Oh! I'll show y'."

I said, "No, I won't play cards."

He said, "Why? Hit won't be a bit a'harm fer you and me t'sit here and play a game a'cards."

I said, "I don't believe it'll stop there. Playin' cards is like drinkin' liquor. Hit will grow on y'."

He said, "Oh!" He wouldn't let it.

I says, "Y'can't help it if y'play awhile with me'r'anybody." I says, "You'll get t'where you can play pretty good, and you'll want t'bet some."

"Oh," he said, "I wouldn't."

I said, "If I was t'play cards with y', and later you was t' get into a rarr [argument], then you'd think back and say, 'Well, Aunt Celia learnt me.' I'd be t'blame. I'd be th'cause of it."

He still thought he'd get me t'play, so he kept on. He said, "Well, if y'don't play with me here, I'll go t'somebody's that will. And I'll bet my farm!"

I said, "See there? Already you're a'thinkin' about bettin'." He never did ask me, ner I never did see that deck of cards n'more. They got missin'. He got t'thinkin' about what I'd said t'him.

If I could go back, I would want t'live closer and do more for th'Lord. Go t'church and all. I've tried t'live a pretty good life.

I've never harmed anybody.

Done my part.

The brooms Aunt Celia makes are of bundles of broom sage trimmed to about twenty-four inches long and bound at the base by twine or a narrow strip of cloth wrapped around the straw eight to ten times ([ILLUSTRATION 56](#)). “This used to be all th’kind of broom we had. They last me about three months. ‘Course I don’t do much sweepin’. I have t’hold to a chair. I sweep out th’corners twice a week. I don’t do no moppin’ though. I got a woman t’get me a bundle of straw and I made six of’em. You can have this’n now. You sweep with it!”

It was my hope that we would be able to interview Aunt Celia often, but she grew ill, and died in October.

This was a personal loss for me. She was a friend, but more than that I was attached to her like close kinfolk.

Aunt Celia will not be forgotten, and what she told us will be preserved, and cherished by our staff for years to come.

She has set an example and hopefully, many will follow it. I won’t think of Aunt Celia as dead—just gone home.

KATHY LONG BLALOCK

## **SCRUB BRUSHES**

A durable brush or mop was needed to clean the rough-hewn wooden floors of log houses. Here’s a description of one type we’ve found used in earlier mountain homes.

This scrub brush was made from a small white oak sapling trunk about two inches in diameter and four feet long. From the bottom, the trunk is shaved into thin, narrow splits (as for white oak splits) about twelve inches long. Be sure not to cut the splits away from the main part of the trunk (see [ILLUSTRATION 57](#)).

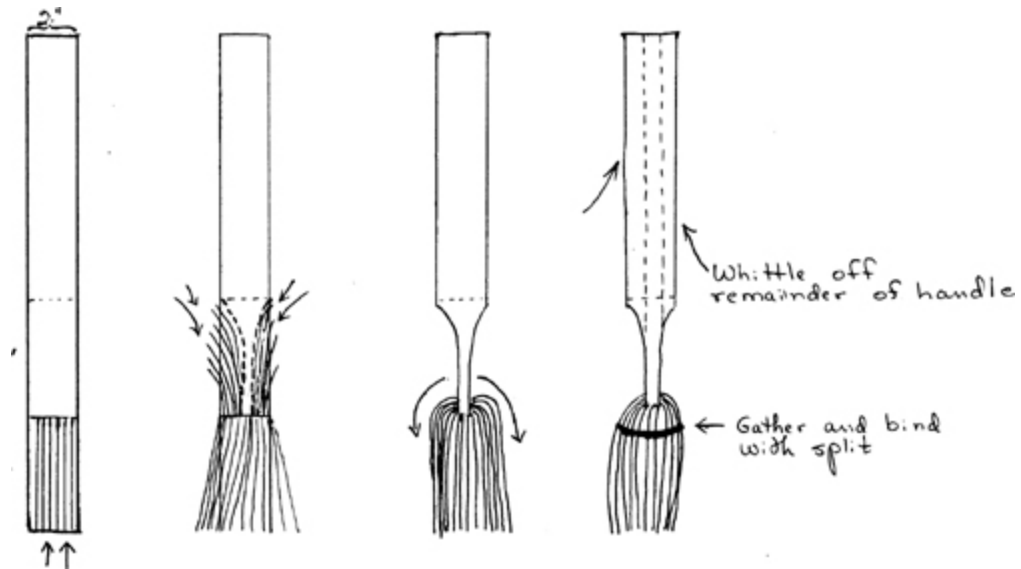


ILLUSTRATION 57

Then split the wood down about twelve to fourteen inches and bend these splits over to form the outer “bristles” of the brush. Use a narrow leather strap or another split to hold the bristles together ([ILLUSTRATION 58](#)).

To scrub, throw sand and water on the floor and scrub with the brush. Sweep the sand off and the floor will be white.





ILLUSTRATION 58

## CORNSHUCK MOPS, DOLLS AND HATS

We heard from a number of people that Mrs. Kate Hopper, who works in the Rabun Gap Craft Shop, knew how to make scrub mops from cornshucks. As we were interested in this subject, we went to investigate. Luckily, she agreed to make one for us, and as she made it, we took a set of photographs so you could see how it is done.

*Photographs and interview done by Jan Brown and Mary Garth.*



ILLUSTRATION 59 L. D. Hopper (Kate's husband) works on the board for the mop. The board should be 5½" wide, 13¾" long, and 1½" thick. Eighteen holes (one inch in diameter) should be placed in three rows of six holes each, as pictured.



ILLUSTRATION 60 Kate soaks the cornshucks in a tub for several minutes to make them pliable. Then she and Jan Brown (right) fit the dampened cornshucks through the holes (*top*). The loose ends of the shucks are put through first. Note that the whole shuck is used; the shank is not cut off until after the mop is completed. When all the loose ends are through, they should be pulled firmly until they are tight (*bottom left*). Then Kate trims the shanks and ends to make them even (*bottom right*).



ILLUSTRATION 61 Mary Garth demonstrates the effectiveness of the new mop on Kate's porch.

## DOLLS

The cornshuck dolls we have photographed were made by Daisy Justice and Lassie Bradshaw. Not many of our contacts remember making or playing with cornshuck dolls as children. They remember more about homemade rag dolls, although they did make little horses and dogs from shucks. The cornshuck dolls now are usually made for doll collectors more than for toys.

The materials needed are a ball of twine or crocheting thread (not nylon as it stretches); scissors; a bowl of water to dampen the shucks; clean shucks—white, or any available colors (mildewed or dark shucks may be used for the bottom layers of the skirt and the inside parts of dolls); and corn silks—blonde, red, and brown—for hair.

Different people have told us varied lengths of time to wet the shucks before using. It seems the best formula to follow for dolls is to trim a few shucks, dip them in water for three to five minutes, then drain and use.



ILLUSTRATION 62 Daisy Justice works on a cornshuck doll.



ILLUSTRATION 63 To make the head, cut a cornshuck two inches wide and six inches long. Fold it over lengthwise, making it one inch wide (*top*). Begin folding shuck down several times to make the filling for the head (*middle right*). When finished, the filling for the head should appear as shown (*middle left*). Cover the filling with another shuck as illustrated (*bottom left*). This shuck will extend below the neck to form the upper body of the doll. Tie the shuck at the neck (*bottom right*) to secure it tightly.

The shucks seem easier to use when dampened a short time rather than soaked. As the shucks dry on the newlymade doll, they will fluff out. The sashes will tighten so that they don't come untied when dry.

There are many variations of the cornshuck dolls ranging in sizes from three to twelve inches high. Some wear dyed dresses (the shucks are dyed just like fabric before making the dolls); some are boy dolls with pants on.

We believe that the pattern shown is a basic style, and once you get the gist of making a cornshuck doll, you will develop your own techniques and try out various ideas.

*Interviews by Shanon Jackson, Julia Justice, and Annette Reems.  
Photographs by Phil Hamilton. Text by Annette Reems.*

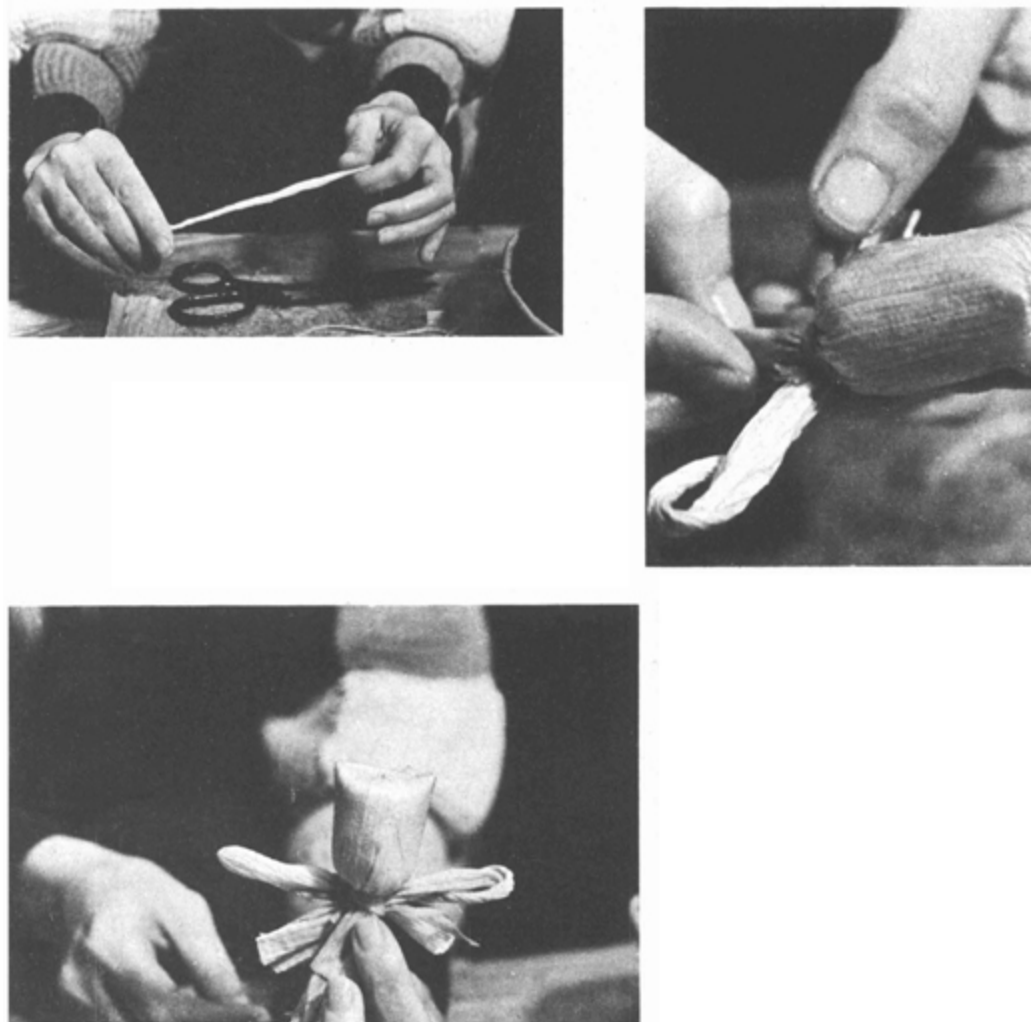


ILLUSTRATION 64 For the arms, pick two shucks about the same size (one will be used for each arm). Twist each shuck as pictured (*left*). Bend each twisted shuck in half (*right*) and tie one on either side of the body of the neck with string. Attached arms should appear as shown (*bottom*).

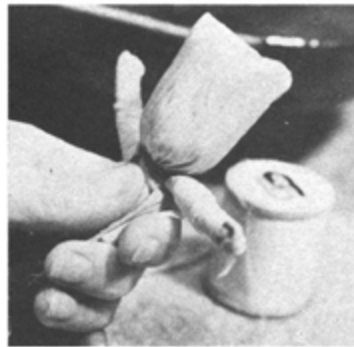


ILLUSTRATION 65 Take another shuck and wrap it around one arm—forming a sleeve beginning about  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch from the folded end (hand) of the arm, and wrap back toward the head (*top*). Bring the end of the wrapped shuck across the back of the doll diagonally to the waist. Go through the same process with the other arm. Sleeved arms should appear as pictured (*middle*). The sleeve strips crisscross in back. Tie them at the waist with a piece of string (*bottom*).



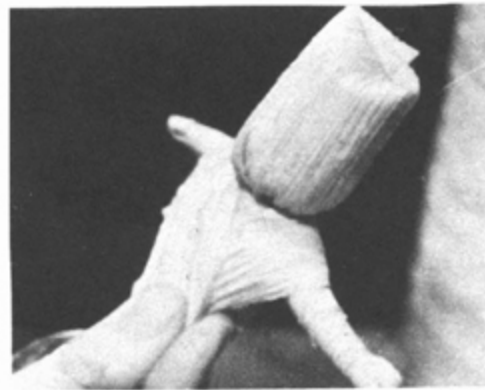


ILLUSTRATION 66 Now cover the body with two shucks. One goes diagonally across each shoulder (*top*). These shucks crisscross in back and front. Tie them at waist with string (*bottom*).

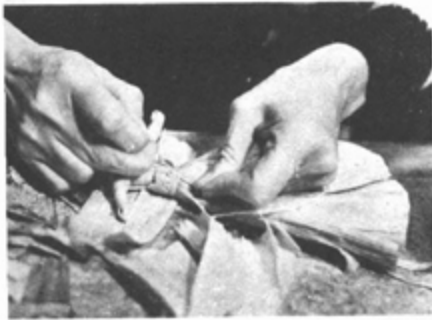


ILLUSTRATION 67 Place several shucks lengthwise (one at a time) around the waist. The shucks will overlap to form a full, long skirt (*top*). Use as many shucks as needed for desired fullness, and tie at waist with string (*left*). Trim the skirt to make it even, so the doll will stand straight (*right*).



ILLUSTRATION 68 Next crisscross two shucks over the shoulders (*left*) and bring them down below the waist in front and back. Fold another shuck into a long, narrow strip. Put it around the waist and tie as a sash in back to hold the bodice secure (*right*). (An apron may be added before the sash is tied by cutting a shuck into a heart shape and placing it around the waist.)



ILLUSTRATION 69 Dampen corn silks and put them over the doll's face. Tie the silks around the forehead with string (*top*). Flip the silks to the back, exposing the face (*bottom*). The string will be completely covered by the "hair."



ILLUSTRATION 70 Take a 1½-inch-wide strip of shuck about six inches long and place it over the head, leaving the hair exposed just above the face (*left*). Fold the hat down onto the back of the head. Then fold in the hat to the middle, bunching in back (*right*). Tie with string and cover with a narrow shuck for the hat tie. Finish the doll by drawing a face with pen and ink.



ILLUSTRATION 71 Other accessories may be added, such as a bucket (*top*). Use any small, deep container, such as a plastic bottle cap. Punch holes in each side of the “bucket” and run a twisted shuck through the doll’s hand (loop formed by folded arm shuck), and then through the holes of the bucket to form a handle. Small dried flowers stuck through the doll’s hand are another option (*bottom left*). Touch a little glue to the stems and hand to secure the flowers. For a broom (*bottom right*), take several shucks about three inches long and tie with a string about a third of the way down. Take a straight pin and shred the lower two thirds. Stick a toothpick, or other small stick, in the top for handle. Put glue on the end of the stick to make it stay on the shucks. Then slide the “broom” handle through the doll’s hand.

## HATS

Many people have inquired about the cornshuck hats that were sometimes worn to church. We heard that Mrs. Ada Kelly made these cornshuck hats. We went to see her and she was willing to make one for us. As she made it, we took a set of photographs and have made a list of instructions to show how one can be made. The hat Mrs. Kelly made for us was a miniature, but there is a drawing of the pattern including the dimensions for an average-sized head.

Shuck several ears of corn; discard the outer shucks and any shucks with blemishes. Put the shucks in water until they are wet and pliable (about fifteen minutes). To make a pattern for the hat, you need to cut the pattern out of a newspaper or piece of brown paper. Materials needed are stiff buckram, muslin for the lining, cornshucks dried in the fall, thread, a needle, and a pan of water to keep the cornshucks wet.

ANNETTE REEMS

*Photographs by Barbara Taylor and Stan Echols.*

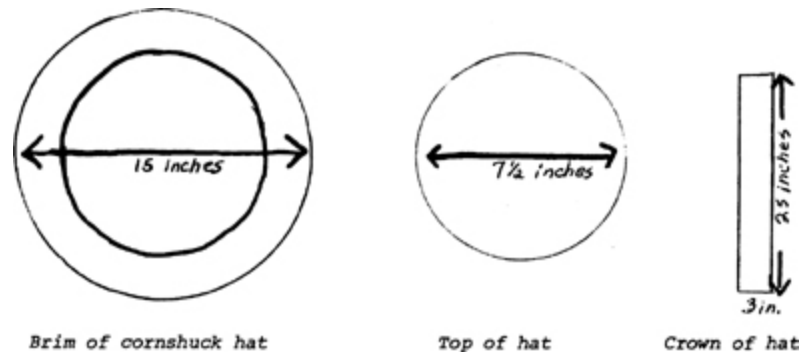


ILLUSTRATION 72 This diagram is a pattern for an average-sized cornshuck hat.



ILLUSTRATION 73 Mrs. Ada Kelly cuts the shucks into 1 1/2" squares.

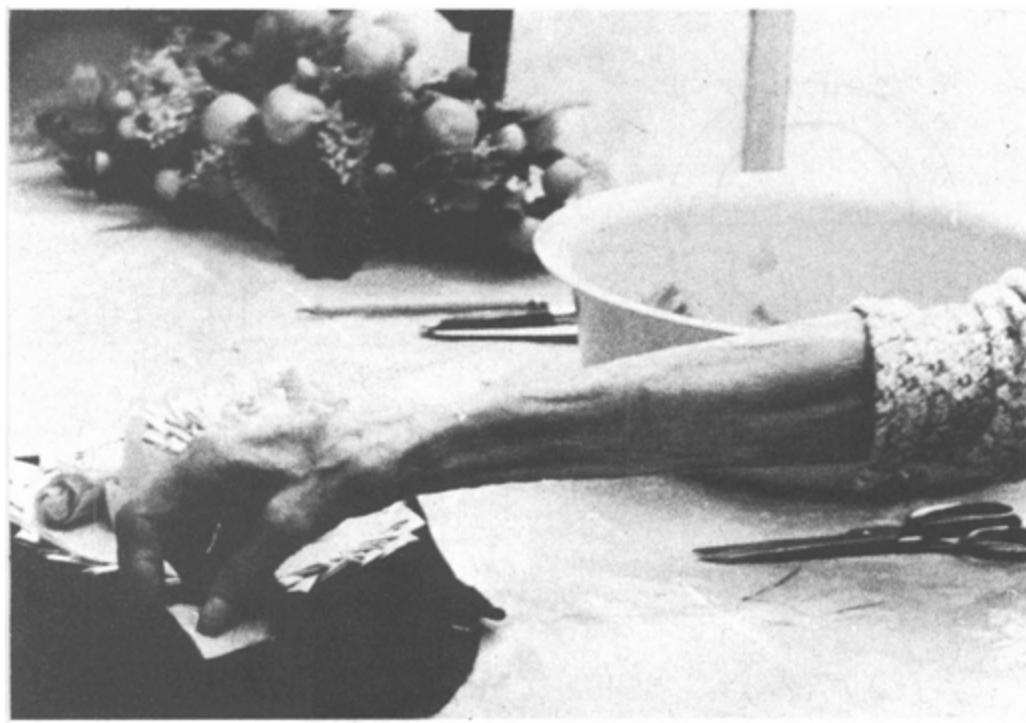


ILLUSTRATION 74 Take each square and fold it in half and then in half again, causing the folded shuck to have a point like the one Mrs. Kelly is holding.



ILLUSTRATION 75 Sew the shucks on buckram, starting at the outer edge and going toward the center.



ILLUSTRATION 76 Sew the shucks on the crown with the points of the shucks downward; then sew the ends of the crown together.



ILLUSTRATION 77 When the crown is finished, place it down on the brim and sew the crown onto the brim.

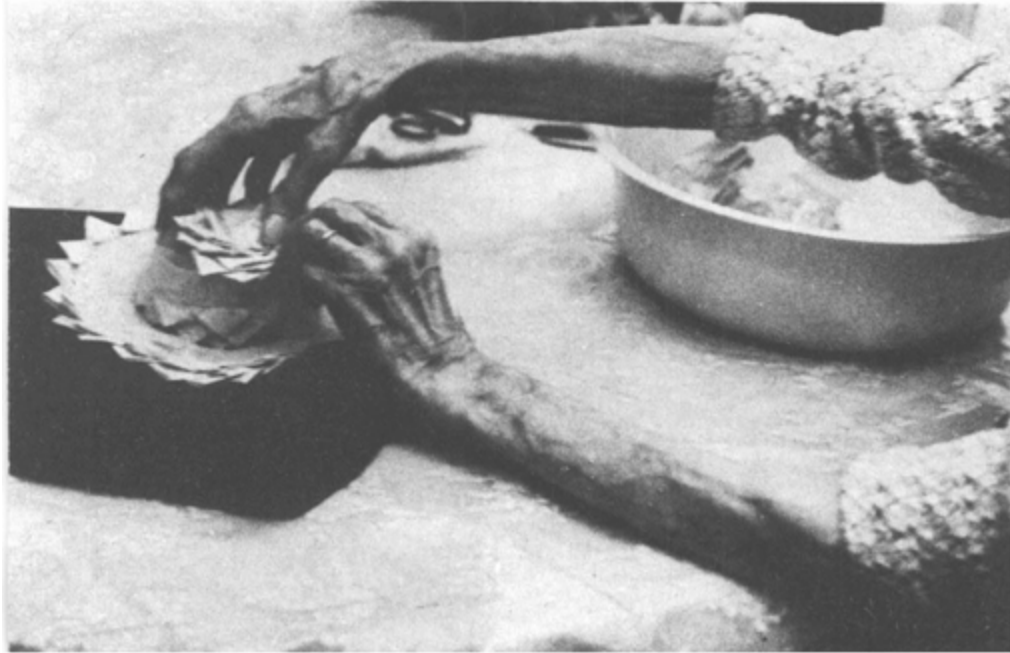


ILLUSTRATION 78 Sew the cornshucks on the top, starting at the outer edge and moving toward the center.



ILLUSTRATION 79 The shank of a cornshuck can be used at the center of the top, making it look like a flower (*left*). Place the top of the hat on the crown and sew it on (*right*). Take muslin or other soft material and sew it onto the underside of the buckram for a pretty lining.



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