OF THEIR ANCESTORS

Indians Adhere To Crafts

By DIXIE HUVAL

In Louisiana there are still a few people who adhere to the craft-making of their ancestors. Among them are the Coushattas Indians of Elton, the Chitimacha Indians of Charenton, and the Acadians of Southwestern Louisiana.

Mrs. Lorena Langley, a Coushatta Indian from Elton, is one of the craftsmen who has been weaving baskets since childhood.

Her long black hair hangs on her shoulders as she moves her fingers quickly to work on a small circular loom. "I learned this from my mother. I remember the first basket I sold was for only 20 cents. I use pine needles which are dried for about six weeks and steel pins to make the baskets," she said.

Full Face

Mrs. Langley has a full face and dark eyes. She was dressed in gingham.

On the table before her was an assortment of baskets which she had made. The unusual shapes of these baskets appeal to collectors of Indian artifacts. There was one resembling a cat and one that looked like a swan. Another was shaped like an alligator.

"I work on a small basket for about four days. All of my children know how to do this too," she said.

Mrs. Langley has displayed some of her family’s baskets in New Orleans, Lafayette, and in Oklahoma cities.

The Chitimacha Indians of Charenton, make baskets considered the most completely traditional in Louisiana. They use native split bamboo from the cane field, cut in the sun for a week, then split again. It is colored by using natural dyes.

Black Walnut

For example, the black coloring, the bamboo is boiled in black walnut leaves and seeds. A yellow dye is made by sunning and boiling the bamboo in orange shells and water. Red dye is made by

MRS. ALEXIS CLARK of Dusson sitting at the loom.

sunning the bamboo, soaking it in linn, followed by boiling it in porp ac (root of the pokeberry plant). The material is dried, split again and reweven wet. This type of basketry is the hardest to make but it is the most traditional because of the detailed work.

Unfortunately, the Chitimacha basket-making is almost lost, as few tribal members practice the art today.

Another culture which follows the craft-making of their ancestors is the Acadians. Mrs. Alexis Clark of Dusson, sits at a tall wooden loom. There are six foot pedal looms. Threads cross each other on the loom as she brings a movable part toward her, she is making a rug.

She sits serenely, absorbed in the work she is doing. When she speaks, it is in French.

Her mother, Mrs. Abenoe LeBlanc, sits at a spinning wheel. She sits comfortably, even barefooted, and converts the brown flax into thread. Acadian blankets and rugs are made of cotton yarn ("yellow cotton" which is close to brown) and does not need to be dyed. The cotton is hand-picked, ginned, carded, spun and woven. Techniques in Acadian weaving still hold to the traditional forms of 18th century weaving of the French Canadians.

Weaving Patterns

Patterns in Acadian weaving include: solid, striped in two colors of cotton, striped in two weights of cotton, and more complex warp patterns.

These hand-made crafts are a collection at the Lafayette Natural History Museum and Planetarium in Lafayette. Curator Robert Smith said, "Our collection is an expression of regionalism. Today there are people who have learned a craft of their own people – father to son – and the products are available and we have been buying them. The Service League of Lafayette has given us funds to purchase for this collection."

"It's a lot of people doing their traditional crafts with native materials," he added.

He feels that it is important to promote these crafts because how else can we preserve, not just crafts, but the life of a past age?

More Pictures

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Basic Sailing Course Slated In Lafayette

The Lafayette Chapter of the American Red Cross announces Part II of a Basic Sailing Course.

Students should be 11 years old will be taught in February.
Ambassadors Kept From Entering School

CAPHINGO, Mexico (AP) — About 300 students barricaded themselves inside their school and blocked U.S. ambassador Jose Linares from entering.

The incident occurred Friday at the national government's Chapango Agricultural School 10 miles northeast of Mexico City. Mexican officials, students and Mexican students from outside the school for a graduation ceremony.

Newsmen at the scene said several students shouted that their school was being forced to enter.

At a news conference later, Roemer said he had been hired by the administration to straighten out the school's computer operations.

Living Cost Index Hit By Error

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Bureau of Labor Statistics says the Consumer Price Index has risen by 13 percent in the past year. The index is used by the government to calculate the cost of living and inflation.

Roemer hires computer experts

Baton Rouge, La. (AP) — Two computer experts have been hired by the administration to straighten out the school's computer operations.

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Review Asked For Refugees From China

HONG KONG (AP) — The Reform Club, a group of Chinese businessmen, Saturday urged Hong Kong's British government to review each case before returning to China refugees who swim to Hong Kong.

The club said refugees should be allowed to remain if they meet such conditions as having close relatives in Hong Kong or applying for a visa to return to their home country.

Hong Kong started on Nov. 30 returning Chinese refugees as illegal immigrants. So far more than 30 Chinese have been returned.