

THE PINE-NEEDLE BASKET BOOK

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The pine-needle basket book by M. J. McAfee & Edwin Lang

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M. J. MCAFEE & EDWIN LANG

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BASKET BOOK**



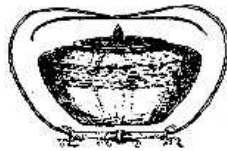
MRS. M. J. McAFEE,
ORIGINATOR OF PINE-NEEDLE BASKETS.
(Taken at the Age of Sixty-eight.)

The Pine-Needle Basket Book

BY

MRS. M. J. MCAFEE

Originator of Pine-Needle Basketry



Illustrated

By

MRS. EDWIN LANG

With an Introduction

By

DR. LOY MCAFEE INGRAM

THE PINE-NEEDLE PUBLISHING COMPANY

NEW YORK

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INTRODUCTION
BY
DR. LOY McAFEE INGRAM

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THE "PINE WOODS."

A PERSONAL NOTE

"All outward wisdom yields to that within,
Whereof nor creed nor cannon holds the key;
We only feel that we have been,
And evermore shall be.

"And thus I know, by memories unfurled,
In rarer moods, and many a nameless sign,
That once in Time, and somewhere in the world,
I was a towering Pine."

—Bayard Taylor.

If, as the Vedantists believe, the soul sleeps in plants, dreams in animals, and awakes to its fullest being in man, a whole forest of pine trees must have become sentient when I was born.

Pine trees, baby pines, pine needles, pine burs, "pine knots"—anything and all things associated with the pine—have always held for me some mystic spell.

My earliest recollections centre around the "piny woods" of Georgia, and the Georgia pine is to me the queen of the forest, the "mother of legends."

How many a happy hour have I spent "riding horse" on a pliant pine sapling in the thicket behind the garden of my childhood home!

How many a thrilling toboggan slide have I had on the sleek pine needles that covered the hill behind the old school house!

How many a time have I risked limb and life to gather the luscious muscadines from the vine entangled in the boughs of some tall and wind-swept pine!

How many a time, tired from roaming the woods, have I stretched myself full-length upon the fragrant pine-needle carpet, beneath the trees, to dream the hours away under the mystic spell of the music of the pines!

And how many a time, in later years, have I looked up from the "cañons of brick and mortar to the ribbon of sky overhead," and longed to do all these things once more, "far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife," deep in the fastness of the "piny woods."

"Where all the winds were tranquil,
And all the odors sweet."

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ANNOUNCING

Through the years of activity in another sphere I have looked forward to the time when I might pay some modest tribute to my forest queen; when I might bring from her still sleeping soul some message to the soul of the waking world.

In response to this desire the Pine-Needle Publishing Company has come into existence. From time to time, as opportunity and inspiration meet, this inherent and abiding love for the pine tree will be expressed in whatever manner the inclination of the moment may suggest.

It has seemed fitting, for several reasons, that the first effort in this direction should be "The Pine-Needle Basket Book," which my mother, the originator of pine-needle basketry, has formulated, and my sister, Mrs. Edwin Lang, has illustrated.

Being myself an earnest advocate of the gospel of work, and believing sincerely that there is no age-limit to usefulness, it occurred to me that if my mother, who was seventy years old last December, and who is still an active member of the work-a-day world, would publish something of her work as a seventy-year mile-post, it might serve to encourage others along the journey of life.

Furthermore, the book will answer the oft-repeated request from her many pupils in basketry for the published technic of pine-needle basket making. Having taught the basket work class of the Summer School of the University of Tennessee, at Knoxville, for the past five years, the present session being the sixth, her pupils now number several hundred, many of whom will doubtless be pleased to see a contribution to craftsman literature by "the Grandmother of the Summer School."

When we were children down in Dixie our grandfather, my mother's father, was wont to relate, to all who did not know the story, the history of the wonderful hat which "Mary Jane" made for him during the War out of the needles of the long-leaf pine. No panama was ever lighter or more comfortable to wear. The only head covering for which he would voluntarily relinquish it was the cap of gray, which, though beyond the conscript age-limit, he wore in active service during the last three years of the War.

This pine-needle hat was the tangible expression of that necessity which has ever been the mother of invention, and was the progenitor of the pine-needle basket, as portrayed in the pages which follow.

When the supply of hats gave out in the family, or families, during the War, there were no others obtainable with which to supply the deficiency, for the nearest town was thirty miles away, and there were no trains or trolleys by which to reach it.

My mother, in an effort to supply the need for hats, made one of bulrushes, but it proved too heavy to be worn with comfort. While still searching for some native product from which to make a hat light enough to be worn with ease, she happened to see a limb of long-leaf pine in a wagon load of "pine straw" with which the negroes were covering the potato beds—a custom still followed in the rural districts of Georgia.

She conceived the idea that these long, slender needles might be so treated as to render them sufficiently tough to be woven into a hat, while still retaining their pliability. She succeeded, after some experimentation, in accomplishing this in the manner detailed in the description of her work. The pine-needle hat of which our grandfather loved to tell was the first product of her new-found craft.

The last spool of Coats thread was used in making this hat, and for all the others "homespun" cotton thread was employed.

When the War ended, the so-called reconstruction days were veritable ones for her, with a growing family to minister to under a totally new régime. And so the pine-needle hat became a part of wartime family lore, kept more or less fresh in mind by my grandfather's pride in the fact that "Mary Jane" could meet such an emergency as a dearth of hats in such an admirable manner.

The family of five children had developed into men and women, and the impromptu hatmaker had become a grandmother, when the craft was revived, again in an accidental manner, and for a different purpose.

When the writer was a "freshman medic" she acquired the spruce pillow fad—for were we not told by our professor of materia medica that tired brains may be soothed into forgetfulness of quizzes, "exams" and other horrors of medical college life by the fragrance of *oleum pini sylvestris*? No college "den" was complete without one or more spruce pillows. While my love for the pine tree was and is sufficiently general to include every branch of the very large pinus family, which embraces the spruce pillow variety, my preference naturally inclined me to want a pillow of the Georgia pine. No northern member of the pine family, I imagined, could possibly be more fragrant and soothing than its southern relative. Imbued with this idea, I wrote my mother to send me from Georgia to New York a bagful of needles of Georgia pine.

She was in the heart of the "piny woods" at the time, where forests of long-leaf pine stretch for miles over the sand fields. She gathered the neighborhood children into a small and vociferous army of invasion, and marched them to the woods to gather the pine needles, promising to tell them stories as a reward for their assistance.

When their baskets, filled with the fresh green needles, were brought to her a particularly beautiful sprig of long-leaf pine caught her eye. The