**Viola Hendren Grandmother’s Crafts**

I remember going out with my grandmother when she would harvest her birch bark and her wiigob, which is the thread used to stitch birch bark when making baskets and crafts. She would always take two or three of us kids with her. She was a little woman, so if she wanted some birch bark that was higher up, the kids would climb up the tree and cut the bark and start peeling it. I don’t remember if I did that myself, but maybe I did, because I was a tomboy. We would also find the tree that gives the thread, the wiigob, and we would get long strips of that.

When she had finished gathering what she needed, we would carry it home for her. She had a government house, but in the corner of the lot she built a little wigwam, and that was her real home. That was where she sat all day long with her dog and did her crafts. She made birch bark baskets and souvenir birch bark canoes. She did beadwork as well. She did all different crafts. We didn’t bother her when she was busy with her crafts, and I think that was a very enjoyable time for her.

When birch bark is first peeled off the tree, I remember it as being very pliant and easy to work with. I don’t know if there was an aging or curing process. But I do remember that when my grandmother would go out to get birch bark, she would get large quantities, so there were always rolls of birch bark in her wigwam.

And when summertime came, she would put a stand out by the highway – old 169 – and she would put her crafts out there, and tourists would stop and buy them. Sometimes us kids were allowed to make little baskets and little canoes, and if they were good enough, they would be hung out there for sale, and we would get our two cents or nickel. That was a big deal for us to sell something.

I know my grandmother made an awful lot of crafts not only for commercial use, but also for her own use. I can remember the birch bark maple sugar baskets, which had the little sugar cakes stored in them. The baskets were a special shape, kind of like a ginger jar, and they had a cover.

Those sugar cakes were our special treat if we did a chore. That was our candy. Some of them had little designs on them, like maple leaves or cones or seashells. And some people just made their sugar cakes in regular muffin pans. My grandmother made her own sugar and sugar cakes, and her own maple syrup, too.

I remember a lot about my grandmother and the crafts she did, and I wish I could go back to those times.