



President's Message

Gourds in American History

The IGS has received a query about how gourds were used in America in the 19th century. This query allowed me to combine my day job as librarian with my extra-curricular work with gourds.

I usually rely on Ginger Summit for a concise summary of gourd history. In her book published 2000, Gourd Crafts: From bowls to birdhouses; 20 projects to dye, cut, carve, bead, and woodburn in a weekend, she notes that "gourds have been used for thousands of years by people all over the world as utensils, dishes, containers, storage vessels, and even simple musical instruments. Originally gourds most often were left undecorated and were simply taken for granted in all facets of daily life, much as we use plastic and metal tools and containers in our lives today."

Gourds began to be embellished with various materials and designs and that has caused me to wonder: if gourds were our original containers (and they were) and if they were used as our plastic containers are today, do you suppose that in 200 years artists will be painting and etching and adding feathers to our plastic refrigerator containers? Perish the thought! Even the most humble gourd holds, for me, more interest than my plastic ware. Gourd artist Jolee Schlea once said, in a class I took at an IGS show, that one gourd had been on her workbench for more than a year. She was waiting for it to speak to her and help her decide what it would artistically become. I have some gourds in that category right now: their sizes and shapes intrigue me. There is a glimmer of what I might do with them, but it has not yet become clear. I cannot, however, imagine staring at my refrigerator container and asking it what it wants to be!

Charles E. Heiser, Jr., in The Gourd Book (1979) spends more than fifty pages wrestling with the origins of gourds in America and never proves to himself nor the reader whether gourd seeds floated across the ocean or were carried across by man. His research, however, is extensive, the pictures excellent, the

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Makes great gourd plants

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