

# Cree Birchbite

## ORIGINS

*Date:* Circa 1960

*Place:* Beaver Lake, Saskatchewan, Canada

*Materials:* Bark from a Birch Tree



Birchbite Front

*Donated*

*By:* Unknown

## DESCRIPTION

The birchbite piece measures 8.1cm x 8.7cm, being slightly wider than it is long. The Birchbite is a small square, primarily a yellow-tan color. On it are a large number of darker patches created by someone biting into the bark. Careful examination also shows that the piece was folded before being bitten. These folds are clearest in the cardinal directions, but they appear in diagonal directions as well, meaning a total of 4 folds are visible. It is notable that this is not unlike how paper snowflakes are made by children today, with a single piece of material being folded and then modified to create a standard pattern.



Back view with Frame



Back View



Caption added during framing

## CULTURE

### Description:

As mentioned, this piece was made by the Cree People of Saskatchewan in Canada. Historically, the Cree have lived throughout North America with their territory reaching from upper Canada to the Rocky Mountains. Today there are many Cree Nations within Canada, however we know this piece comes specifically from the Beaver Lake Nation.

The Cree have always valued artistic skill and continue to do so today. Quillwork, wood carving and beadwork are some of the most valued art forms within Cree culture. All of these were used not just for decoration, but were also used heavily in trade, recording histories and stories and most importantly, all of these forms of art held a certain cultural significance.



*Caption:* Image of Cree people  
Circa 1870-1910

Taken from The Canadian  
Encyclopedia

### Use within Culture:

This birchbark piece is a re-creation of a specific type of birchbark that fell out of use. These birchbark pieces showed patterns that were then recreated by beads. The pattern on this piece was of spiritual importance to the Cree, though its full meaning has been lost to time. This is because starting in the early 1600s, birchbarking and other ceremonies were outlawed by colonists in Canada.

This specific piece was made by Angelique Merasty of Beaver Lake who at one point was the only woman who knew the proper technique. Since then she has taught many people and while the number of people who know how to do this is still low, thanks to Angelique Merasty's efforts, the art form itself has not been lost.

**Report written by:** Patrick Taylor