

Wilson, Myrna



Koasati Pinestraw Basketmaker

Myrna Wilson, a member of the Koasati (Coushatta) tribe in Elton, Louisiana, is the daughter of Bel and Nora Abbey, Koasati traditionalists. Born into a family with strong ties to their culture, Wilson was destined to learn the crafts of her people. She began making pinestraw baskets as a child of three years, a craft she learned from her mother and grandmother. Wilson and her sister, Marjorie Battise, learned to make coiled baskets, as all of the little girls were expected to learn basketry from their mothers. The baskets were sold to collectors as a primary source of income for the family. Mrs. Wilson still uses the same materials for her baskets today. The only tool required is a sewing needle, and the materials needed are pine straw and raffia, a fiber made from palm leaves.

Mrs. Wilson has presented her baskets at folk festivals and events such as the Louisiana Folklife Festival in Baton Rouge, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, the annual "Basket Day" in Williamson Museum, the Natchitoches-NSU Folk Festival, and the Bayou Indian Festival. Wilson has some pine straw vases in the Creole State Exhibit and the Folklife Program Collection in the Alexandria Museum.

Wilson has worked hard to preserve her Koasati cultural heritage, not only with her crafts, but also with her stories. Like her father, Bel Abbey, and sister, Marjorie Abbey Battise, she was inducted into the Louisiana Hall of Master Folk Artists in 1982 for her contributions to the Koasati tribe and the Louisiana Folklife Center.

Researched and rewritten by Samantha Sullivan.