

The Porcupine Quill Cradle

Christianna Morris was a Mi'kmaq artist from Halifax who lived during the 19th century. She married and gave birth to a daughter but her husband passed away shortly after. She never re-married and later adopted a son.



Morris was a master porcupine quill artist and frequently made gifts for Queen Victoria who in turn gave her land and a cottage on Chocolate Lake, outside of Halifax. Christianna Morris was well known in the art community as well as the political community. She was a prominent citizen and travelled in the same social circles as Joseph Howe and many Halifax Mayors.

The cradle is the only known example of her quill work that survives. It was made in 1868 as a gift for Mr. and Mrs. Reuben Rhuland, friends of the Mi'kmaq community, during the birth of their son. The frame was made in Mahone Bay by Alexander Strum, Mrs. Rhuland's brother. The cradle is lined with red velvet that has since faded. Morris made the panels with individually chewed porcupine quills in birch bark. It took her one year to complete the cradle. It is also believed that Christianna Morris made a similar cradle that was presented to Queen Victoria, for her son Edward, the infant Prince of Wales.

The artist was well known for her decorative artwork, as well as her virtue and piety. Many portraits exist because of her ornate beauty and character.

The cradle was in private ownership and was eventually acquired by W.T. Ritcey of Acadia Gas Engines Ltd. His mother was related to Alexander Strum, the frame's builder. Ritcey donated the cradle to the DesBrisay Museum in 1920 and it is one of our most celebrated artifacts.