

*Douglas Cyr rustic birch bark containers*

**MCC-00406**

**Finding Aid**

**Prepared by  
Anne Chamberland, November 2013  
Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes  
University of Maine at Fort Kent  
Fort Kent, Maine**

**Title:** Douglas Cyr rustic birch bark containers

**Creator/Collector:** Cyr, Douglas

**Collection number:** MCC-00406

Shelf list number: AX-406

**Dates:** 1950s

**Extent:** 1 box (2.0 cubic feet)

**Provenance:** Material was acquired from Douglas Cyr, Human Resource Manager at Irving Woodland, LLC in the Fort Kent office.

**Language:** Not applicable.

**Conservation notes:** All four birch bark containers were gently brushed to take off as much debris as possible and each container was wrapped in tissue paper.

**Access restrictions:** No restrictions on access.

**Physical restrictions:** None.

**Technical restrictions:** None.

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**Citation:** Douglas Cyr rustic birch bark containers, MCC-00406, Acadian Archives/Archives acadiennes, University of Maine at Fort Kent

**Separated materials:** Not applicable.

**Related materials:** Not applicable.

**Location of originals:** Not applicable.

**Location of copies:** Not applicable.

**Published in:** Not applicable.

**Historical notes:** Birch bark contains natural waxes that make it waterproof, remarkably rot resistant, and flammable. Its pliable properties make it the perfect material to use not only in canoe or house construction but also to make containers for collecting, storing, cooking, and consuming foods and drinks. They were made to hold water and store foods such as berries, roots fish, meat, oil, and bear grease. Soups and stews were cooked in them by adding hot stones of by

hanging the basket directly over a fire. The fire needed to be watched very carefully to ensure that the basket did not flame while the food was cooking. At other times, baskets were buried in the ground, filled with water and very hot rocks were dropped into the water to bring it to a boil. New rocks were continuously added to keep the water cooking the fish or meat. This way the container could be reused. A birch bark container could be made waterproof by sealing the seams with spruce gum.

**Biographical information:** J.D. Irving LLC started in 1882 with a sawmill in the small rural coastal community of Bouctouche, New Brunswick. The company founder, James Dergavel Irving (J.D. Irving), was the son of enterprising immigrants from Dumphries, Scotland.

The original company holdings included: a sawmill, gristmill, carding mill, a general store, lumber business and three farms. J.D. was an innovator and a dedicated investor in new methods, equipment to improve productivity and service – a tradition that we carry on today.

Kenneth Colin (K.C.) Irving, born in 1899, inherited his father’s entrepreneurial spirit and keen interest in business. K.C. was a driven and dynamic builder of enterprises who “liked to see the wheels turn”. Under his leadership, the business realized significant growth and diversification in the transportation, shipbuilding, construction and retail sectors.

In 1957, James K. (J.K.) Irving (K.C.’s eldest son) pioneered the company’s reforestation and tree improvement programs and expanded our forest products’ business. Over the past 55 years the company planted over 877 million trees – a national record in Canada. Trees, being nature’s air filters, absorb carbon dioxide to combat global warming. Today, continual reforestation is sustaining jobs and value-added operations that J.K. and his sons have grown over the years.

Like the generations before them, J.K. and his sons, Robert and Jim, are builders. They believe that good products, superior service, continuous improvement and the front-line efforts of skilled employees are the most important ingredients to success.

Founded in 1882, J.D. Irving, Limited (JDI) has operations in Canada and the United States. We are a team of 15,000 dedicated employees, with business units in: Forestry & Forest Products; Transportation; Shipbuilding & Industrial Marine; Retail; Industrial Equipment, Construction Services & Building Materials; Consumer Products. Since our inception over 130 years ago, our employees continue to build JDI into a diverse group of performance-driven enterprises. It is through our dedicated team and using the best practices, to make the best products that enable us to serve our customers - at home and around the globe.<sup>1</sup>

**Scope and content:** This collection consists of four rectangular birch bark containers found in the woods around the Allagash region by lumbermen working for J.D. Irving Fort Kent office located on the Saint John Road. The containers measure between 5” and 8” wide by 11” and 16 “ long. The birch bark is brittle and the containers are in poor to good condition. The four containers are kept together at both ends by a rusted metal clip.

**Inventory:** 4 birch bark containers

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jdirving.com/default.aspx?id=658>