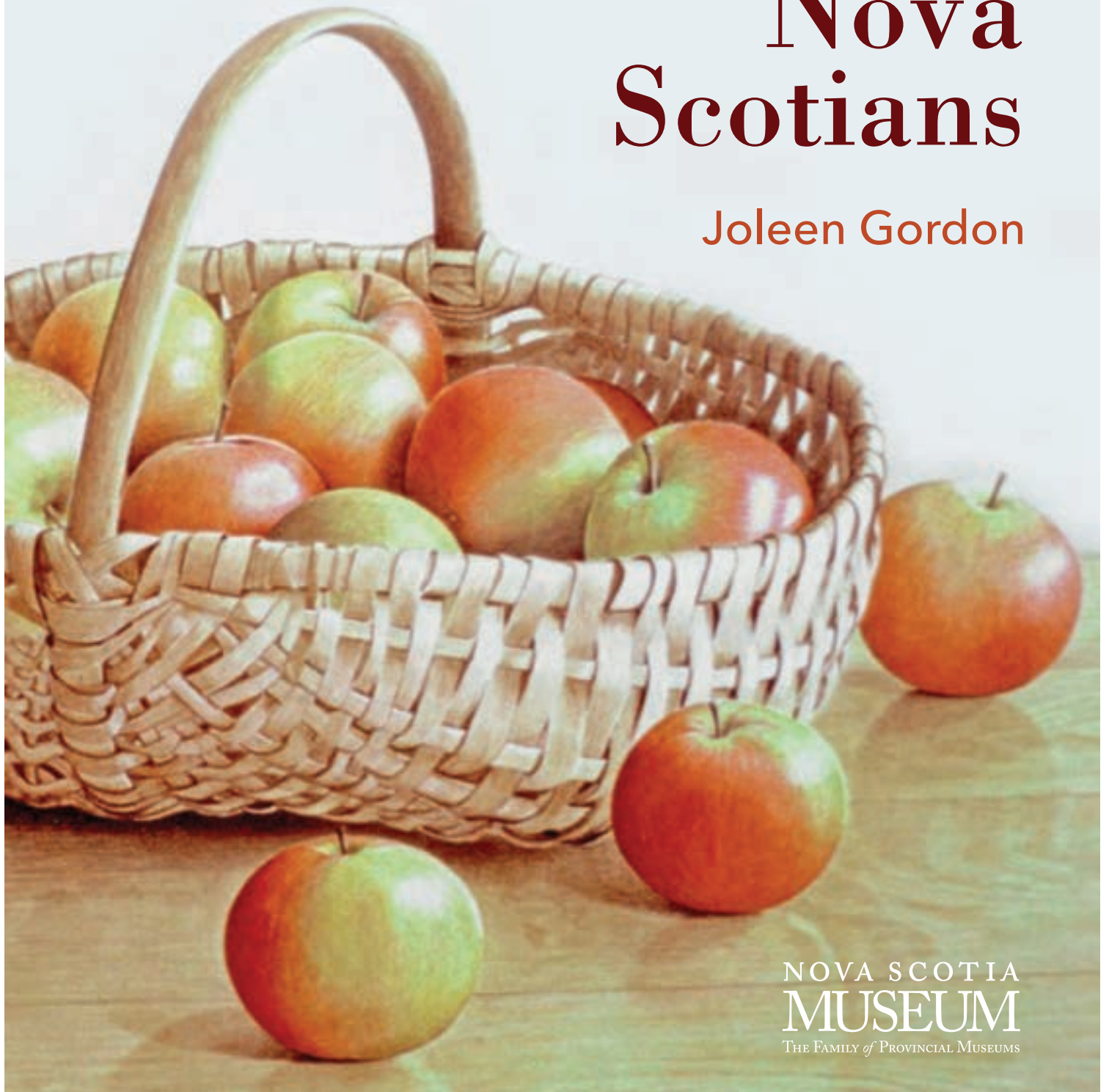


Baskets of Black Nova Scotians

Joleen Gordon



NOVA SCOTIA
MUSEUM
THE FAMILY of PROVINCIAL MUSEUMS

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Front Cover Image

“Basket of Apples” by Nancy Stevens, Antigonish, NS, 1975. Acrylic on illustration board. Typical of the style woven by the women of the Black community in Nova Scotia, this basket was probably made by Edith Clayton of East Preston, NS.

DEDICATION

To the tradition bearers.



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I first met Mrs. Edith Clayton in 1974 when she was teaching evening classes for the Department of Continuing Education in Dartmouth. Knowledge of making maple baskets has been passed down in her family from mother to daughter for six generations in Nova Scotia. It was the wish of her mother, Irene Selena (Sparks) Drummond, that this craft be preserved. Together, Mrs. Clayton and I prepared the book, *Edith Clayton's Market Basket, A Heritage of Splintwood Basketry in Nova Scotia*, published by the Nova Scotia Museum in 1977 which contained step-by-step photographs of the making of a market basket.

If the book were re-published, it was Mrs. Clayton's wish that we add photographs taken in October 1987 of her making a fruit basket, a baby cradle and a horn-of-plenty. She passed away in October 1989. Along with newly discovered historical photographs, the 1987 images add greatly to the documentation of this important craft in the Nova Scotian Black community. Long may their work continue in the hands of their descendants.

Photographs for the original text were taken by Ronald Merrick and detailed drawings were made by George Halverson, of the Nova Scotia Museum, Learning Resources and Technology, Nova Scotia Department of Education. Photographic work for this edition was done by Roger Lloyd and Richard Plander of the Nova Scotia Museum, Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture and Heritage. I thank them all for their dedication and excellent work.

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I am deeply indebted to my mentor the late Edith Clayton, and her late husband Clifford, for sharing their love of basketry. Their family members have been very helpful in my study. These include the three sisters of Edith Clayton: the late Nancy Drummond Lucas, the late Esther Drummond and the late Dollie Drummond. The daughters of Mrs. Clayton: Clara Clayton-Gough with her daughter Etta Gough and granddaughter Tracey Gough; Martha Grant and her daughter Patricia Boucher; Althea Tolliver; Vivian MacPhee; and Pamela Drummond Wall. Mrs. Clayton's sons were also helpful, especially Peter Clayton, with whom I collected maple on a construction site where we nearly broke our legs walking through felled trees. The family of the late Nancy Lucas includes her daughters Bernice Lucas and Lene Boutilier, her late son Angus Lucas and her granddaughter Jane. They have all made me feel a part of their loving family, which I regard as a privilege. Thank you.

Joleen Gordon
Research Associate, Nova Scotia Museum
2013

INTRODUCTION

Basketweaving is a traditional craft which has been practiced in several Black communities in the Halifax-Dartmouth area of Nova Scotia: Cherry Brook, East Preston and Lucasville. (Figure 1) The making of baskets is a family affair. The men cut red maple saplings, the women prepare the wood and make the basket framework; the children often complete the weaving.

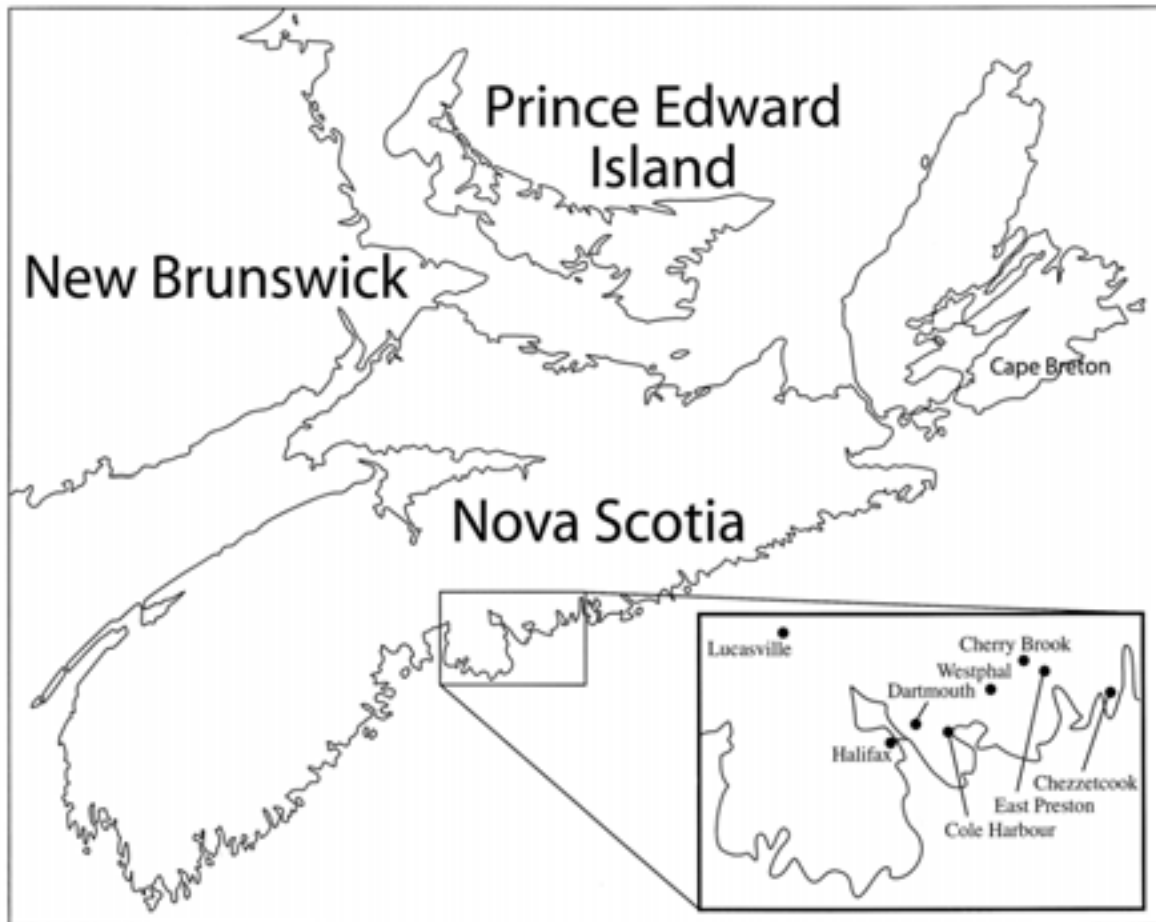


Figure 1. The Maritime Provinces of Canada, with an insert map of the Halifax Regional Municipality, showing communities whose members sold their baskets and garden vegetables at the Halifax Farmers Market.

They weave what are called ribbed or frame baskets because the shape of the ribs determines the shape of the basket. (Figure 2) The framework of the market basket begins with two circles of wood, rim and handle. The rim is inserted inside the handle and held at right angles. The relative position of these two circles determines the depth of the basket. They are held together with a distinctive X-shaped wrap on either side.

(Figure 3) The ribs are inserted into these wraps in a definite position and sequence. The ribs are long and narrow with sharp tapering points on either end. These form the warp of the basket through which ribbon-like pieces of wood, the splits, will be woven as the weft. The same amount of weaving is done on either side of the basket with the rows meeting in the middle of the bottom.



Figure 2. Small basket, 21 x 24 x 22 cm, woven of red maple by Mrs. Riley of Preston, NS, 1928. Purchased at the Halifax Farmers Market by Harry Piers for the Provincial Museum. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 28.223.b (6416); Nova Scotia Museum N-6881.

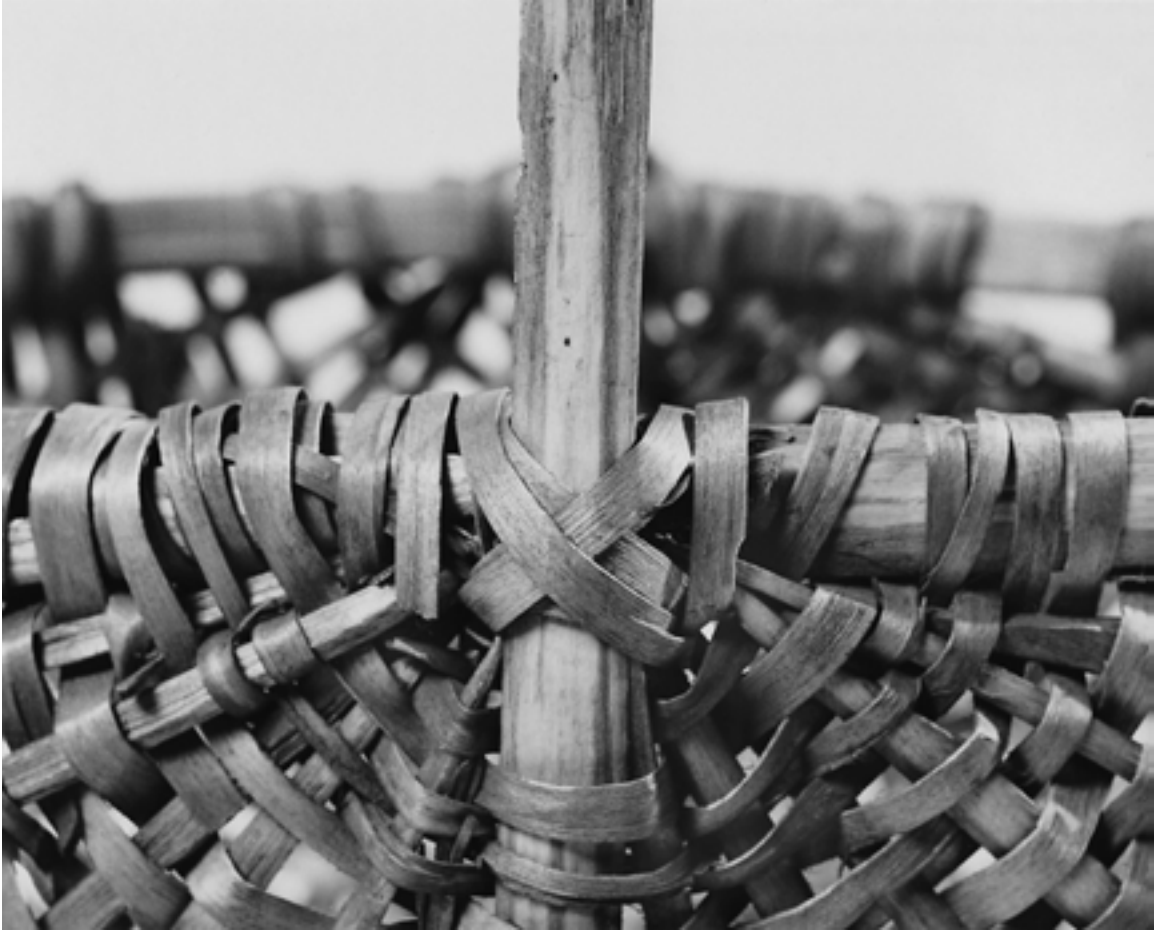


Figure 3. Detail of the X-shaped cross wrap in the basket woven by Mrs. Riley. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 28.223.b (6416); Nova Scotia Museum N-6876.

Like all traditional crafts, basketweaving requires the commitment of someone who loves working with the material and with their hands. That sense of commitment has been instilled by mothers teaching their children within the Black community of Nova Scotia. These basketweavers can trace their ancestry back to the Black Refugees who came to Nova Scotia from the Chesapeake Bay area of the United States during the War of 1812. Living here, they needed baskets on their farms. With the Halifax Farmers Market as a sales outlet, they continued making ribbed baskets in their new homeland. Their descendants weave baskets for use in their communities and to sell at the market, thus keeping the craft alive in their hands.

HISTORY OF THE RIBBED BASKET

Following the path of a craft tradition is a fascinating journey, with many intriguing links between cultures as they interacted and adapted to new environments with new materials, and to new economies. People are always moving from one place to another for a variety of reasons, crossing paths, retracing steps, and branching out into new territories.

The ribbed basket is a very old design found in many parts of the world. (Figure 4) The form has always been associated with the working people of Great Britain and continental Europe. Dorothy Wright, the late British basket historian, believed this style was made well before the rise of the strict professional guilds in Britain. "Frame or ribbed baskets are probably one of the oldest types in Britain, and were seldom, if ever, made by a professional basketweaver. Fishermen, farmers and other country people made them for own use."¹ Itinerant gypsies also made ribbed baskets, known as "Gypsy Baskets", for sale to farmers and gardeners. (Figure 5) In much the same way as the present-day Black Nova Scotian women strip maple, the gypsies stripped white willow rods into narrow, paper-thin "ribbons" to weave their baskets.² Ribbed baskets were also made in France, where the basket historians Duchesne, Ferrand and Thomas acknowledged that they were in a different category from all other baskets, calling them "vannerie rustique" and "très ancienne".³



Figure 4. Small basket with a diamond-shaped wrap, 13 x 37 x 23 cm, maker unknown, Isle of Skye off the west coast of Scotland, date unknown. Note the similarities of wrap and overall shape between this and the Joe Diggs basket from Nova Scotia, Figure 28. National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh. QP37/C-4944.



Figure 5. Shopping basket, 10 x 33 x 23 cm, made by the gypsies at Hurtwood, Surrey, England, about 1945. This basket style is very similar to one woven by Black women in Nova Scotia. Note the shape, the simple cross wrap and the wrapping of the split twice around the rim. Rural History Centre, University of Reading, Reading, England. N-60/7852.

It is curious that ribbed baskets were never produced in large quantities. There may be practical reasons. Baskets made with flat, circular bottoms and straight sides, using the stake-and-strand technique, could easily be replicated on moulds to exact sizes. In this manner, they were woven in large numbers and used as measures in the fishing and farming industries. Ribbed baskets are not made on moulds. It is almost impossible to make two the same size “by eye”. Also the overhand (transverse) handle makes filling and emptying awkward, lowering its efficiency in a production line.

Some basket historians believe the ribbed basket to be of Celtic origin and some authors have provided documentation to support this theory.⁴ The Irish basket-weaver and researcher Joe Hogan presents linguistic evidence, examining Gaelic words still in use in Ireland to describe sizes of ribbed handleless baskets, similar to the ribbed basketwork shields used there in ancient times.⁵

The Celtic peoples seem to have originated in Eastern Europe; they migrated west and east over Europe, beginning about 3200 years ago. If the Celts did develop a ribbed basketry, their movement across Europe may explain why we find ribbed baskets spread over a wide geographic area: Hungary, Germany, Sweden, France, England, Ireland and Scotland.

Ribbed market baskets in these countries have many variations. Rim-and-handle circles are held together either with a small cross wrap or a larger diamond wrap. Ribs are inserted into the wrap in either single or multiple sets, producing symmetrical or asymmetrical, deep or shallow, or squared or rounded shapes. The weaving, however, is always done in an over-one, under-one pattern on each consecutive rib, beginning from the wraps on either side working toward the mid-line.

Basketweavers, with a good three-dimensional concept of space and a good working knowledge of materials, could readily make a ribbed basket from many materials at hand: whole vines, woody shoots, narrow strips of split wood, whole or split roots. Combination of the economic need for a container with the old adage, "Necessity is the mother of invention", probably led to the ribbed-basket design travelling across Europe from marketplace to marketplace.

Wright felt that the ribbed basket design "went to the Appalachian Mountains with the [British] settlers."⁶ This theory is supported by the American basket historian Sue Stephenson, who presented linguistic evidence showing that not only were some British basketry terms, such as "osier", "sally" and "withe" used in the New World, but also that some of the basket names, such as "ose", "spelk" and "swill" had been transferred without alteration.⁷ Roy Overcast, working with the Tennessee basketweavers, agrees with Wright's theory, giving evidence that many impoverished country people were brought from Britain to work as indentured white servants on the British tobacco plantations of the Chesapeake Bay region soon after colonization in 1607.⁸

As tobacco production grew, labour was recruited from enslaved Black people as well. The first Africans arrived in 1619. Both servants and slaves worked side by side under an overseer.

Slaves were treated as servants whose indentures never expired; class distinctions, that is, the differences between the free landholders and servants and slaves, were more important than race.⁹

The two groups of labourers worked, ate, and slept together. Unlike plantations further south in Georgia, South Carolina, and Florida, Black slaves in the Chesapeake Bay area were, initially, in the minority and came under a greater British influence as they adapted to life in the American colonies. This may explain how the ancestors of the Nova Scotia Black basketweavers learned a European style of basketweaving.

Ribbed baskets are not traditional in Africa. Jocelyne Etienne-Nugue with UNESCO in Paris, France, recorded neither ribbed nor splintwood baskets in her extensive work; African baskets are either coiled or twined of grass or rush.¹⁰ Judith Wragg Chase of the Old Slave Mart Museum in Charleston, South Carolina, studied craft connections between Black people living in America and those still in their places of ancestral origin in Africa.¹¹ From her experience, the only basket tradition in the United States that can be traced directly back to Africa is the coiled sweetgrass and palmetto leaf Gullah Basket of South Carolina. (Figure 6) Other researchers working with these basketweavers agree.¹²



Figure 6. Gullah basket, 28 x 27 x 28 cm, maker unknown, Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, USA, about 1975. Baskets are made by coiling sweetgrass, palmetto leaves, bulrushes and long-leaf pine needles. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, Dartmouth. 01.06.02. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,621.

Basketry traditions of white servants and Black slaves in the Chesapeake Bay area were never recorded. It is entirely possible, given that both knew how to make baskets, that they shared basketry knowledge. Ribbed basketry may have passed from white British indentured servants to Black African slaves on the tobacco plantations of Chesapeake Bay.

Today in the Appalachian Mountains, both Black and white basketweavers make the ribbed basket, although fewer of the former.¹³ John A. Burrison of Georgia State University has said, "It may be that the South's Black population was more actively engaged in making rib baskets before the Revolutionary War, but I suspect that will be hard to document."¹⁴ Years later, during the War of 1812, some southern Blacks came to freedom in Nova Scotia, while many of the white servants moved west, after release from servitude, into the mountainous area of the Southern Highlands

The Appalachian ribbed basket is basically a circular handle-and-rim framework held together with a wrap, into which ribs are inserted. There are many variations. Handle and rim circles are made either of single pieces of wood, or a long piece of vine wrapped two or three times into a circle. The wrap varies from a small cross to a more elaborate diamond. (Figure 7) The number of ribs may vary. Only one set creates a symmetrical melon shape requiring no turnbacks; multiple sets create a more angular shape, requiring elaborate turnbacks. (Figure 8) Sometimes weaving on the rim is interwoven with a decorative splint. (Figures 9 and 10) In some baskets, a rib is added above the rim. Most Appalachian ribbed baskets are made with white oak, while others are made with hickory, dogwood and honeysuckle vine.



Figure 7. Hip basket, maker unknown, West Virginia, USA, about 1960. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-6799.



Figure 8. Side view of the hip basket, showing the line of turnbacks along the middle. Nova Scotia Museum N-6799.



Figure 9. Basket, 32 x 26 x 27 cm, woven by Maggie Murphy of Cannon County, Tennessee, USA, 1976. Note the raised rib above the wide rim, along with the wide handle allowing space for interweaving the splits with a darker split, a technique known as "braiding." Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-6788.



Figure 10. Side view of the hip basket showing absence of turnbacks. Note that the width of the weavers increases toward the middle. Nova Scotia Museum N-6787.

BLACK BASKETWEAVERS OF NOVA SCOTIA

“One of the grandmothers long ago....” Edith Clayton

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, three main waves of Black settlement came to Nova Scotia. The first group was the Black Loyalists who came from the east coast of the United States, between 1775 and 1785, to Shelburne, Birchtown, Halifax, Annapolis Royal, Fort Cumberland, Port Mouton and Guysborough. In 1796, Maroon immigrants sailed from Jamaica to Halifax. Between 1813 and 1815, Black Refugees arrived from Georgia, South Carolina, Delaware, Virginia and Maryland to settle near Dartmouth.¹ Of these three movements of people, this story is concerned with the Black Refugees.

Edith Clayton of Cherry Brook and East Preston remembered her mother and grandmother saying that “one of the grandmothers long ago in the family came from the United States and she married a man from Africa.”

The 1871 Census of Nova Scotia records a couple matching the family oral history: Henry and Louisa Jackson.² (Figure 11a) In 1871, Henry Jackson was 89 and stated the Congo, Africa, as his birthplace and “Dealer of Vegetables” his occupation. His wife, Louisa was 65 years old and born in the United States. They had three children living at home: George, 36, a “Porter”; Susan, 35; and James, 29, a “Mason”; all born in Nova Scotia. Louisa would have been about seven years old when the wave of Black Refugees was at its peak in 1813.

Province of *Nova Scotia*
 District No. *of West Halifax* sub-District *of West Halifax* Enumeration *of 1871*
 Schedule No. 1.—Sexual Return of the Living.

Sex		Age		Marriage		Profession, Trade, or Occupation		Place of Birth		Religion		Education		Value of Real Estate		Value of Personal Estate	
M	F	Under 15	15 and over	Never	Once	None	Farmer	England	Other	None	None	None	None	None	None	None	None

Figure 11a. Family of Henry and Louisa Jackson, West Halifax, Ward 5. Province of Nova Scotia Census of 1871. Nova Scotia Archives reel no.13626. Library Archives Canada, Ottawa. Public domain.

246	Age	Jackson Henry	M	60	-	Eng. Africa	C. England	African	Deacon	1871	M
		Louisa	F	65	-	U. States					M
		George	M	36	-	Eng.			Deacon		M
		Susan	F	36	-						M
		James	M	27	-				Deacon		M

During the War of 1812, British officials on naval ships spread the word in the Chesapeake Bay area offering freedom under the British crown and land in Nova Scotia, in an effort to weaken the American plantation labour force. The first groups arrived early in the war, and landed at Halifax from the Royal Navy ships *Diomedé*, *Malboro'*, *Junon*, *Diadem*, *Rifleman* and *Mariner*. In preparation for arrival of these Black Refugees to Nova Scotia, the Crown Surveyor laid out free grants of land in the Preston area: Cherry Brook, East Preston and North Preston.

Under terms of the treaty of peace that ended the war, British were required to furnish the Americans with lists of Blacks brought to British territory.³ Very little was documented beyond first names, with ages and birthplaces when known.

In the list of American Blacks brought from the Chesapeake area on board H.M.S. *Diomead* [sic] and landed at Halifax on October 2, 1813, there was a female child seven years old, named either "Louisa" or "Laura"; the handwriting is unclear.⁴ (Figure 12) It is more likely "Louisa" as "Laura" was not a popular name at the time.⁵ Unfortunately, the list does not give names for family or parents — men, women and children were all listed separately. Perhaps this little girl later married Henry Jackson to become Louisa Jackson, "one of the grandmothers of long ago" whose family brought the craft of basket weaving to Nova Scotia.

A List of American Blacks on Board H.M.S. Diomead

Boat's post.	N. Entry.	Year.	Appears once.	Whether and whether first or not.	Place and County where born.	Age at time of entry in this ship.	N. and Letter of Tickets	MENS NAMES.	Quali- ties.	D. D. or R.	Time of Discharge
						24		John Carter	Slave		
						22		John Myers	Slave		
						29		Thomas	Slave		
						29		Leah	Slave		
						28		William James	Slave		
						28		Abraham	Slave		
						22		William James	Slave		
						21		James	Slave		
						25		Robert	Slave		
						22		Richard Smith	Slave		
						26		William Smith	Slave		
						21		Thomas	Slave		
						23		Thomas	Slave		
						21		Paul	Slave		
						20		Charles	Slave		
						21		William	Slave		
						22		Willy	Slave		
						2		Abner	Slave		
						2		Joseph	Slave		
						3		William	Slave		
						7		Thomas	Slave		
						6		Henry	Slave		
						13		James	Slave		
						7		Thomas	Slave		

Edw. Smith, Capt.

Figure 12. "A List of American Blacks on Board H.M.S. *Diomead*". Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax. RG 1, vol. 420, doc. 7, microfilm 15462, Reel 2.

A List of American Blacks on Board H.M.S. *Diomead*. (Figure 12)

29 Nym Carter Shoemaker [sic]
22 Wm. Myers None
39 Sam--- Farmer
39 Luke--- Farmer
35 Solomon Jones Farmer
23 Isaac--- Fisherman
22 Philip Young Farmer
30 Joshua [?]---- Farmer
25 Peter--- Farmer
32 Rachael Bailey Woman Single
36 Mary Jones D'o [Ditto] Married
30 Tiney--- D'o D'o
33 Diana--- D'o D'o
30 Parth [Parthenia]--- D'o D'o
30 Chocolate--- D'o D'o
20 Patient--- D'o Single
22, Kitty--- D'o Married
8 Rose--- Female Child
9 Jacob--- Male D'o
3 Betty--- Female Child
7 Louisa--- D'o D'o
6 Mary--- D'o D'o
5 Sam--- Male Child
9 Henry Jones D'o D'o

Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax RG 1, vol.420, doc.7, microfilm 15462, reel 2.

The 1871 Census of Nova Scotia also listed another Jackson family: Charles (35) and Mary Drummond (34), with a daughter Mary nine years old.⁶ (Figure 11b). It is possible, given the ages of Henry and Louisa Jackson's children plus a history of twins in the family, that Charles was also a son of Henry and Louisa.

No. 74 Province of Nova Scotia District No. 77 East Halifax Sub-District Dartmouth Polling District No. 18 No. 74
 Schedule No. 1.—Nominal Return of the Living.

Name		Sex	Age	Married	Profession	Religion	Place of Birth	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Estate
Drummond	Charles	M	35				England						
	Mary	F	34										
Jackson	Charles	M	35										
	Mary	F	34										
	Mary	F	9										
	Elyse	F	7										
	Harriet	F	3										
	William	M	1										

Jackson	Charles	M	35										
	Mary	F	34										
	Mary	F	9										
	Elyse	F	7										
	Harriet	F	3										
	William	M	1										

Figure 11b. Family of Charles and Mary Jackson, East Halifax, Dartmouth Polling District 197. Province of Nova Scotia Census of 1871. Nova Scotia Archives reel no. 13627. Library Archives Canada, Ottawa. Public domain.

Louisa Jackson may have taught basketry to her daughter-in-law Mary Drummond Jackson who in turn, taught her daughter Mary. This is confirmed by Harry Piers, curator of the Provincial Museum, now the Nova Scotia Museum, who recorded that Mary Drummond Jackson taught basketry to her daughter Mary Jackson. Mary Jackson married John Sparks of Lake Loon and she taught basket weaving to her two daughters Irene Selena (Figure 13) and Ethel. See pages 56-57 of this text for full account of entry 7948 of the Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book. Irene married James Alexander Drummond of Cherrybrook and, in turn, taught her daughters Nancy Mildred (Figure 14), Edith Irene (Figure 15), Esther Adeline and Dollie. (Figure 16)



Figure 13. Irene Selena Sparks Drummond in her garden in Cherry Brook. Date and photographer unknown. Nova Scotia Museum N-5230



Figure 14. Nancy Mildred Drummond Lucas of Lucasville, with her granddaughter Rosalind Drummond. East Preston, August 1990. Photo: Joleen Gordon.



Figure 15. Edith Irene Drummond Clayton of East Preston weaving baskets in her home in 1985. Photo: Michael Doyle. With permission The Halifax Herald Limited, Halifax, NS.



Figure 16. Basketmakers in East Preston: Pam Drummond Wall, Esther Drummond, Dollie Drummond and Clara Clayton-Gough (left to right), August 1990. Photo: Joleen Gordon.

Present-day basketweavers include the daughters of Edith Drummond Clayton: Clara Clayton-Gough (Figure 16), Vivian MacPhee, Althea Tolliver, Martha Grant, and Pamela Drummond Wall (Figure 16). Daughters and grand-daughters of these women have been encouraged to weave baskets, so they know their craft and hopefully will continue the tradition. Over the years, one or two of the men have tried their hand at weaving as well. Nancy Lucas's son, Angus, made very colourful baskets which he sold at the Halifax Farmers Market. Baskets made by this generation are shown in Appendix 111.

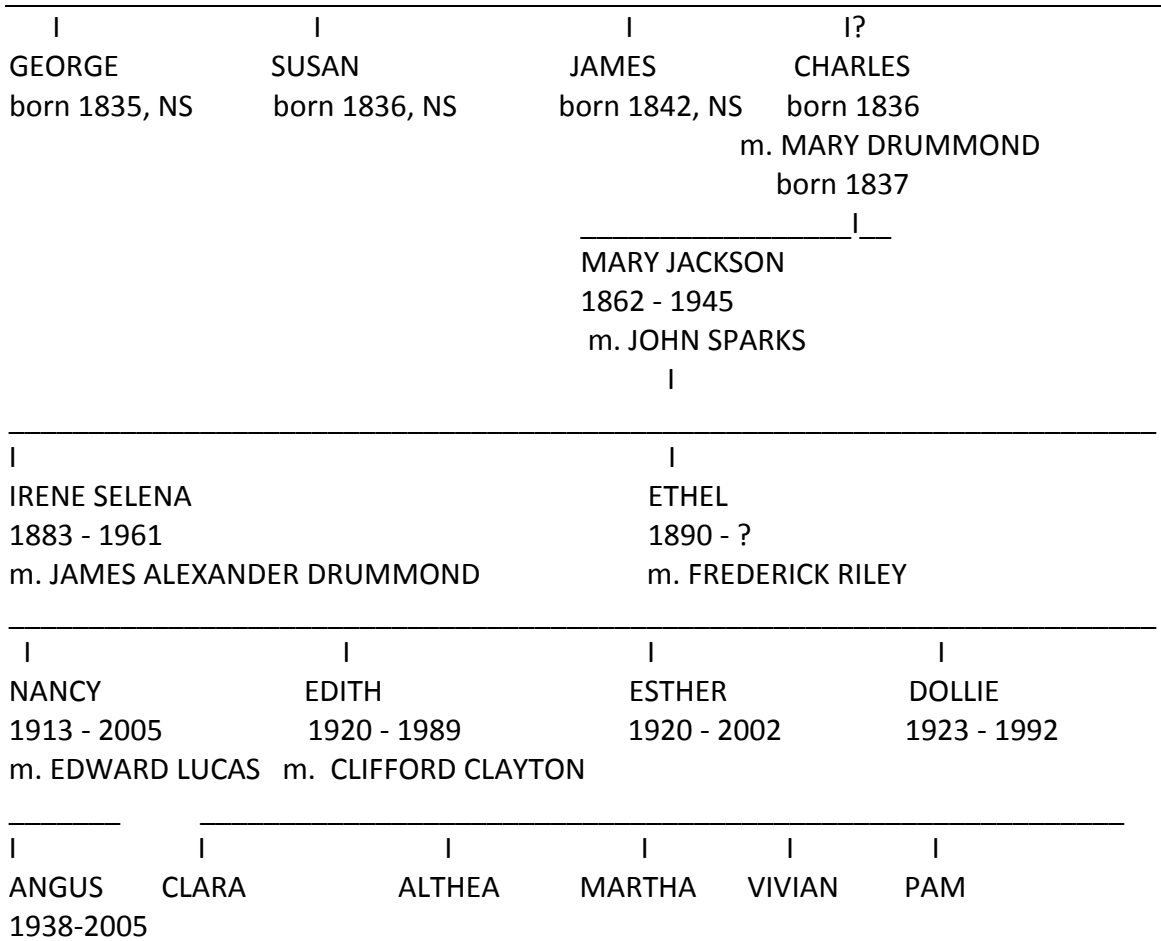
FAMILY TREE OF BASKETWEAVERS

HENRY JACKSON

born 1782, Congo, Africa

m. LOUISA

born 1806, United States



Sources: Clayton family oral history, 1871 Census of Nova Scotia and Harry Piers, Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book VI, Item No. 7948.

Although their baskets look the same, each maker had their own “signature” or way of weaving. Edith Clayton remembered that the older women using much finer splits in their weaving and often adding another rib above the rim, to create a deeper shape. (Figure 17) Nancy Lucas made her cross wrap slightly different from her sister Edith by tucking the end of the wrap over the cross and down into the top of the X (Figures 18 and 19); Edith tucked the split up underneath the X. Esther Drummond made her cross in the same way as her sister Nancy, but often made her handle going the long way of the basket. (Figures 20 and 21) Angus Lucas not only dyed the splits, but also the ribs for some baskets. (Figure 146)



Figure 17. Basket, 21 x 17 x 17.5 cm, woven by Irene Selena Sparks Drummond, Cherry Brook, date unknown. Note the simple cross wrap, the nail in the back of the wrap on the far side, turnbacks on the corners, and the single-rib raised rim on both sides. The splints were dyed red prior to weaving. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 73.147.2; Nova Scotia Museum N-766.



Figure 18. Basket, 17 x 16.5 x 17.5 cm, woven by Nancy Mildred Drummond Lucas, Lucasville, 1991. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 91.21.9; Nova Scotia Museum N-24,620 # 5a.

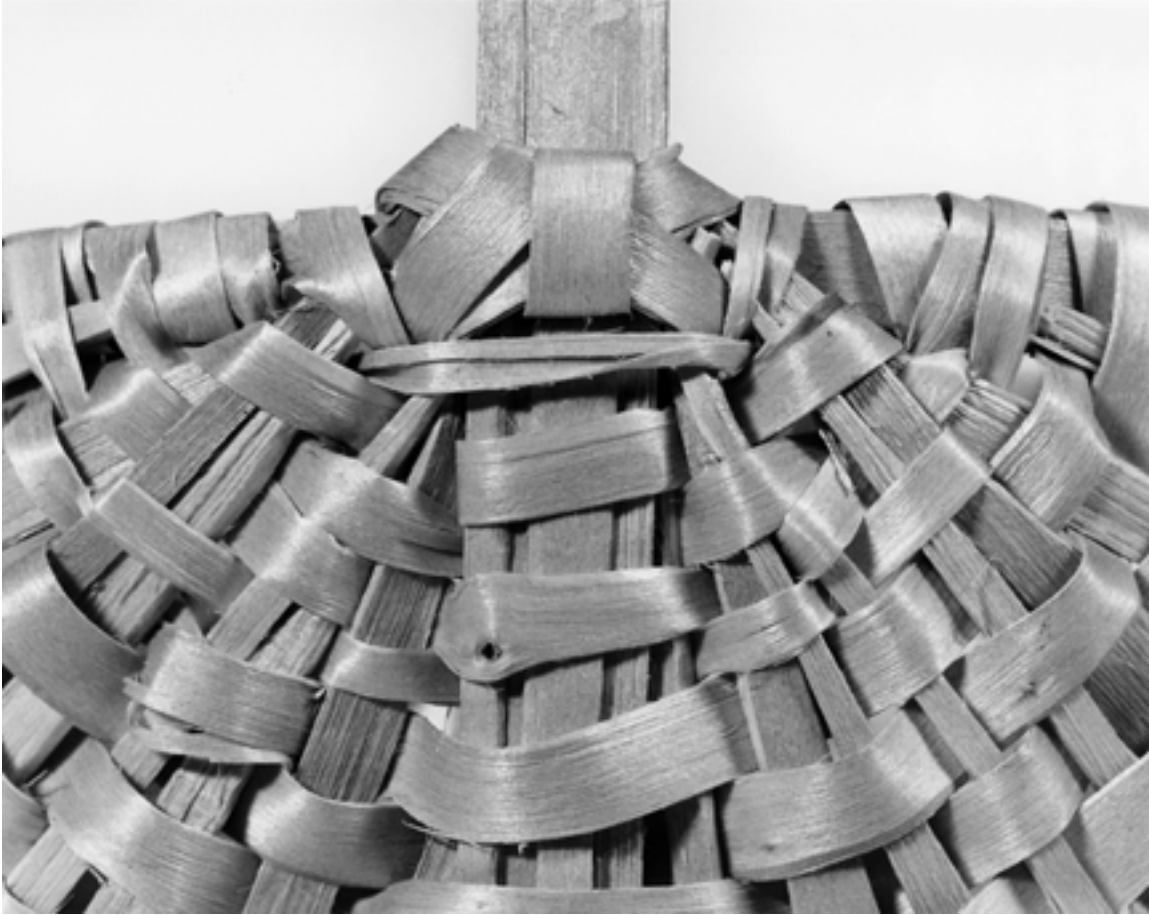


Figure 19. Detail of a cross wrap made by Nancy Lucas. She finished her wrap by inserting the end down into the top of the wrap. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 91.21.9; Nova Scotia Museum N-24,625 # 5.



Figure 20. Basket, 32 x 28 x 37 cm, woven by Esther Drummond of Cherry Brook, 1980. Esther used birchbark as a dye; it has faded with time. She put her handle lengthwise. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,622.

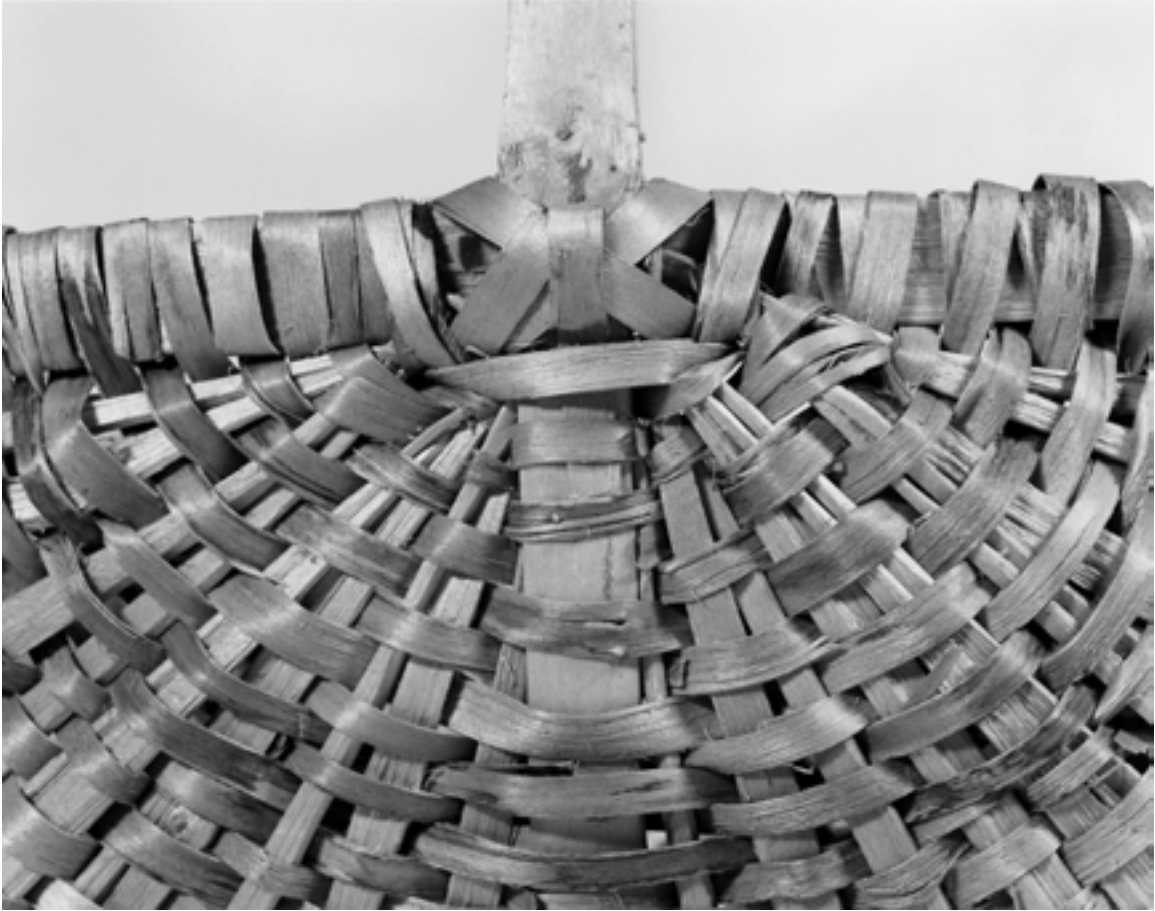


Figure 21. Detail of the cross wrap in Esther Drummond's basket. Her cross resembles that of her sister Nancy Lucas. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,624 # 9.

Baskets were not made in all Nova Scotian Black settlements. Thus far, the craft has been found only in four communities in the Halifax-Dartmouth area: Cherry Brook, East Preston, Waverley and Lucasville.

There are other examples of ribbed baskets in the Nova Scotia Museum collection whose makers, origins and dates are unknown, but are most likely from the Black community. One is a carefully woven and beautifully shaped market basket, with all turnbacks occurring in the corners. (Figures 22 and 23). A smaller basket with a low handle has an elongated shape. (Figure 24) A third basket was donated to the Nova Scotia Museum by Mrs. Mayola Mansfield of Dartmouth. She received this basket in the 1920s from relatives living in Cherry Brook. (Figure 25) The wrap is different, in that the splits are interwoven above the rim and the turnbacks are all in a line in the middle of the basket. (Figures 26 and 27) It is the only known example of this ribbed basket style in Nova Scotia.



Figure 22. Basket, 23 x 30 x 25.5 cm, weaver and date unknown. It has all the characteristics of ribbed baskets woven by Black women: the cross wrap, the angular shape with turnbacks on the sides, and the split wrapping twice around the rim. This fine basket was obtained in Chezzetcook, Halifax County. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 75.111.1; Nova Scotia Museum N-6761.



Figure 23. Side view of previous basket, showing the basket shape and position of the turnbacks. Nova Scotia Museum N-6762.



Figure 24. Ribbed basket with a low handle and an elongated shape typical of older Black baskets, 14 x 35 x 17.5 cm, weaver and date unknown. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection Z2362; Nova Scotia Museum N-6763.



Figure 25. Basket, 31.5 x 41 x 35 cm, made by unknown weaver, presumably from the Cherry Brook area, about 1920. Nova Scotia Museum, gift of Mrs. Mayola Mansfield of Dartmouth, History Collection 80.9; Nova Scotia Museum N-6880.



Figure 26. Detail of previous basket showing the handle-rim wrap with rib insertion.
Nova Scotia Museum N-6879.



Figure 27. Detail of previous basket showing turnbacks in a line along the middle. Nova Scotia Museum N-6878.

Oral and written histories have recorded other basketweavers in the Black community, but unfortunately we have no examples. One weaver was Joseph Diggs in Preston. According to Edith Clayton, he wove baskets only for his family and friends, not to sell. She recalled that in wrapping his handle and rim together, Mr. Diggs made a large diamond. The ribs were inserted into this wrap. He wrapped the splits around the rim twice, "but sometimes only once if he did not have enough splits." Edith Clayton felt that a basket in the Nova Scotia Museum collection may have been made by Mr. Diggs. (Figure 28) The diamond-shaped wrap and the weaving twice around the rim are characteristic of his baskets. The handle, however, is made of several pieces of wood wrapped around in a circle three times; she could not remember that he made his handles in this manner. Mr. Diggs' two daughters, Beatrice Adams and Sarah Fairfax, recalled that their father took great pride in how tightly he could weave his baskets. "He told his daughter Beatrice to go put water into one of his baskets to prove his point." His wife, Isabella, often assisted in making many different styles of baskets, including fishing creels.⁷



Figure 28. Basket, 35 x 58 x 37 cm, thought to have been made by Joe Diggs, Preston, date unknown. Note the handle of twisted rods, the diamond-shaped wrap and the

splits that wrap twice around the rim. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 76.82.3; Nova Scotia Museum N-6779.

Another basketweaver in the Preston area was Jerry Thompson. Edith Clayton recalled that he made baskets entirely of twigs rather than split wood. These baskets had a handle and rim of twigs, wrapped together with finer twigs. Ribs of twigs were inserted into this wrap and weaving was completed with finer twigs. We know of no existing specimen of his work. One basket made of twigs, in the Nova Scotia Museum, perhaps may be his. (Figure 29) It had been used to scoop coal; origin and maker unknown. The style, with the O-ring wrap, is similar to the British "Oyster Tendle"; the wrap, known as "the secret of the tendle" because it holds the basket together.⁸



Figure 29. Basket, 42.5 x 50 x 51 cm, thought to have been made by Jerry Thompson, Preston, date unknown. Note the O-shaped wrap into which the ribs are inserted, the handle, ribs and weavers are whole and twisted rods, possibly witherod. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection, 67.46a; Nova Scotia Museum N-6767.

Edith Clayton's family is proud of her accomplishments. An unpublished oral history written in the mid 1970s, "An Itch for 9" by Mrs. Edith Clayton's eldest daughter Clara, recorded family history and the importance of basketry as a source of income for the family with her goal of making 9 baskets a day.⁹ In August of 1984, the family drove a truck in the Dartmouth Natal Day parade decorated with all kinds of baskets, including the family cradle. (Figure 30) Her son Clifford wrote a book entitled *The Story of Edith Clayton*.¹⁰ Her granddaughter, Patricia Boucher, wrote a poem about her grandmother's work; included here with her kind permission.

Lives and Crafts: Crafts and Lives

The completed basket sits on the table.
It represents a whole and fulfilled life.
The strips are intertwined with hands of love.
The memories are made through the expressions we have.
Basketry is one type of craft.
Just as there are many lifestyles.
There exist many crafts.
One thing all the crafts have in common is they are handmade.
They are made from the very hands we use each day.
And with the very materials which surround us.
The baskets are made from the wood of the maple trees we see in the forest.
Each tree hand-selected to complete the basket.
Just as some experiences we have are not memorable, some trees are not weavable.
It takes a special type of tree to create such works of art.
It takes a special type of person to live a fulfilled life.
We all have a craft we prefer.
Perhaps this is due to the memories we have.
I prefer basketweaving because that was the craft I was raised with the knowledge of.
I have many memories of watching my grandmother weave.
I found comfort as I watched, thinking how many years my grandmother must have
watched her mother as she weaved.
Crafts are a tradition of the past.
Yet, many have been updated to suit the lives of people today.
When you buy a craft, think beyond that product,
Imagine the hands which toiled to produce this craft.
Imagine the history it holds.
The completed basket sits on the table.
Full of love, workmanship and memories of the past.
Until someone comes along and notices its true beauty.
They pick it up and it now is about to become part of a new family, a new life.
It has been passed on to the next generation.
Remember: To cherish and treasure the beauty of a craft is to cherish life.



Figure 30. The Clayton family truck, decorated with the baby cradle and baskets, for the Dartmouth Natal Day Parade, August 1981. Photo: Joleen Gordon.

The basketry craft of the Black weavers has been recognized in many ways. The following list may not be complete; I apologise. The Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia in Westphal displays photographs, baskets and basket tools celebrating the craft of basketweaving in the community. In 1971, the *Handcrafts* bulletin of the Nova Scotia Department of Education highlighted Edith Clayton's work, complete with a cover photograph. During that year, she demonstrated between 10am and 9pm all five days of the Nova Scotia Festival of the Arts held at St. Mary's University in Halifax, July 30 to August 3.¹¹ In 1975, Edith Clayton was invited to demonstrate her craft at the Ottawa Craft Festival. In 1977, she received a Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medal. In 1986, she was chosen to demonstrate at Expo'86 in Vancouver, British Columbia. The poet Maxine Tynes wrote a poem "Edith Clayton's Market Baskets".¹² In the spring of 1989, the National Film Board of Canada released Sylvia Hamilton and Claire Prieto's film *Black Mother, Black Daughter*, featuring Edith Clayton and her family. In the fall of 1989, Edith and her daughter Clara demonstrated their craft at Basketry Focus, a national conference held at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto. Several visual artists, including Nancy Stevens and Henry Bishop, have also celebrated baskets and basketweavers in their works. Edith Clayton has been recognized by the Black Wall of Fame, by the Black Professional Women, and was made an honorary member of both the Nova Scotia

Designer Craft Council and the Nova Scotia Basketry Guild. Nancy Lucas and Clara Clayton-Gough were also made honorary members of the Nova Scotia Basketry Guild.

In May, 1990, the Black Cultural Centre organized “Crafts: Connections in our Lives” as a tribute to commemorate the life of Edith Clayton. In 1996, Carolyn G. Thomas collected a number of profiles honouring members of the East Preston United Baptist Church, *Reflections*, written by family and friends to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the church. Two basketweavers were honoured in that work: Edith Clayton and Joseph Diggs. In 2005, Edith Clayton was included in the book *The Haligonians: 100 fascinating lives from the Halifax region*, edited by Roma Senn.¹³ In their book *Historic Black Nova Scotia*, Bridglal Pachai and Henry Bishop refer to Edith Clayton as “a Canadian and Nova Scotian icon”.¹⁴ In 2009, the Black Cultural Centre hosted a preview of the two-DVD film, “*From These Roots: Taking Up the Basket*”. Produced by American filmmaker Marilyn Thomas-Houston, it features the work of Edith’s daughter Clara and documents Black basketry as an integral part of Nova Scotia cultural heritage.

FARMERS MARKETS

“My mother sold my first basket at the market when I was eight years old.” Edith Clayton

The Halifax Farmers Market began as an outdoor market a year after the founding of the city, when in June of 1750, “The Governor and Council assigned as a site the spot on which the City Court House now stands, for a market for black cattle, sheep, etc.”¹ Fifty years later, in 1800, a new Market Building was built “for the sole use of persons bringing from the country, meat, poultry and butter and other victuals in which they might expose such articles for sale.”² No space was allotted for vegetable vendors, who continued to use the streets and square in front of the market building. Vendors came from the surrounding Halifax-Dartmouth area: the Mi’kmaw communities at Tuft’s Cove and Cole Harbour; the Black communities of Cherry Brook, East and North Preston, Lucasville and Hammonds Plains; and the Acadian community of Chezzetcook. The outdoor scene was very colourful and baskets played a prominent role both in bringing produce to market and as items for sale. (Figures 31-34)



Figure 31. A nineteenth-century Black family on the Hammonds Plains Road, Nova Scotia. Robert Petley. Watercolour over pencil, about 1835. Library Archives Canada, Ottawa, C-115424.



Figure 32. Detail of the Petley watercolour. Library Archives Canada, Ottawa, C-115424.



Figure 33. Halifax City Market, 1890s. Bedford Row looking south from George Street, Halifax. Photo: William Notman. Nova Scotia Archives N-895.



Figure 34. Detail of the Notman image showing a Black woman surrounded by baskets. Nova Scotia Archives N-895.

If one should visit this market scene he would imagine that all [the coloured population in Halifax] had turned out en masse and gone to selling berries in the square; for, surrounded by a bewildering array of baskets filled with berries of every known description, sit enthroned a delegation of coloured ladies and gentlemen who preside over their aggregation of luscious fruits and “yarbs” and roots of miraculous properties, with a dignity that would do justice to an African king or empress.³

Vendors who lived on the Dartmouth side of the harbour rowed, sailed or travelled on the ferry; others came on foot or with horse and wagon. Their “bewildering array” of baskets took so much deck space that in 1855 the ferry captains demanded extra “payment for market stuff conveyed in baskets and other ways.”⁴ The number of baskets in early images of the market is impressive.

The market was held year-round and products reflected the change of seasons as seen in Figure 35 and in the 1972 account of Mrs. William Lawson:

The women in summer gather the wild fruits and flowers of the woods, and bring them to market. The sight there, so familiar, is always amusing. They are seen squatting around the open space allotted to their use in the Halifax green market, with their miscellaneous gatherings for sale...enjoying the warmth and pleasantness of summer. Brooms, baskets, tubs, clothes props, pea sticks, hop- and bean-poles, rustic seats and flower boxes make up part of their various stores. Great baskets of mayflowers and mosses are brought in during the early spring. Some of the bouquets are arranged with a good deal of taste. From the middle of May until late in autumn, ferns of every kind are carried on their heads from door to door, while others of these plants fill barrows in the market, or else stand in boxes made of the bark of the birch and fir trees, greening the sidewalks about. In early winter, the spruce and hemlock trees are laid under contribution. Wreathes and branches, Christmas trees, long festoons of evergreen for decorating, dyed grasses, autumn leaves and sumac berries — in short anything that can be made available for sale is brought to market by the dusky vendors. They gather a good deal of money by these ventures; for such articles cost nothing to produce, only requiring the labour of gathering and carriage.⁵



Figure 35. Scene at the Halifax Farmers Market about 1900 showing Black women with their baskets, and clumps of ferns for springtime planting. The baskets displayed include some made by the Mi'kmaq. Photographer unknown. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 78.15; Nova Scotia Museum N-24,421.

In the early 1900s, the market moved to Cheapside and Bedford Row, still outside on the sidewalks. (Figure 36) Harry Piers purchased two baskets from Mrs. Riley of Preston at the market in 1928 for the museum's collection. (Figure 2)



Figure 36. Basket vendors at the Halifax Farmers Market. Community members have identified the three women (right to left): Selena Sparks Drummond of Lake Loon; Ethel Sparks Riley of Cherry Brook; and Lavinia Brown Glasgow of East Preston. Many wonderful baskets are featured, some with low handles, some with oval openings, some rectangular in shape. There also are some Mi'kmaw baskets. Photo: M. O. Hammond, August 1907. Archives of Ontario, Toronto, F1075 (S-9125).

In the 1930s, the market moved indoors to the Halifax Police Station on Market Street, between Duke and Buckingham Streets. (Figure 37) It was here, in September of 1934, that Harry Piers purchased four baskets from Irene Selena Drummond for the Nova Scotia Museum Collection.



Figure 37. "City Market, Halifax, NS", Marion Lessel, block print with watercolour, 1934. The market was located in the former Halifax Police Building on Market Street. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 72.129.1; Nova Scotia Museum N-24,420.

Piers made detailed drawings of these baskets in the museum accession book (Figure 38), along with information on the family genealogy:

Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book VI, Item No. 7948.

Typical Negro split-wood baskets (4 forms) made by a Negro woman Mrs. James Drummond, born Selena Sparks, of Cherry Brook, Negro settlement, Preston, Halifax Co., N.S., Sept. 1934. They are made entirely - frames, handles and woven work - of "white maple" (Red Maple *Acer rubra* [sic: *Acer rubrum*]). The woman was instructed to make them in typical form.

- (a) Large basket for carrying on the head and for general purpose. All white (natural wood) except for a half-circle of brown below each handle. 23.40 x 15.00 x 8.25 inches
- (b) Fairly large basket, semi-globular, such as are used for picking blueberries and for use about town. Natural wood. 12.00 x 11.20 x 9.50 inches.
- (c) Fancy basket, semi-globular; white, brown, indigo and blue. 12.00 x 9.70 x 8.60 inches.
- (d) Small basket, semi-globular. Natural wood; with a few brown touches at insertion of handles. 8.00 x 7.70 x 6.20 inches.

Made at Cherry Brook settlement, Preston, Hfx. Co., N. S., Sept 28, 1934 and purchased in Halifax market. Bought from the maker Mrs. James Drummond, Cherry Brook for 1.25 for the 4 baskets (approx 31 cents each).

Mary Drummond married Jackson. [their daughter] Mary Jackson born 1862 (now aged 72), married John Sparks, b.1849 (now aged 85), they live at Montague, near Dartmouth. [their daughter] Selena Sparks, b. 1883 (now 51 years old), married James Drummond of Cherry Brook, Preston. She learnt how to make these negro baskets from her mother, Mrs. John Sparks, who in turn had been taught by her mother, Mrs. Mary Jackson.⁶

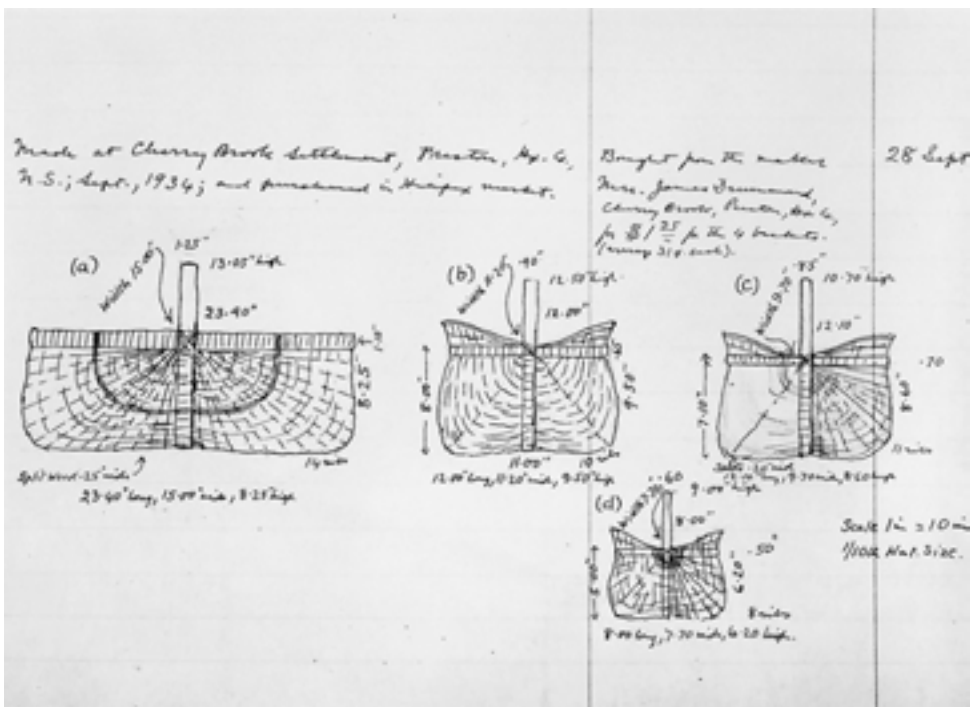


Figure 38. Drawings by Harry Piers of four baskets. Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book VI, Item No. 7948 (now 34.191.a-d), 28 September 1934. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection; Nova Scotia Museum N-6346.

Edith Clayton remembered making her first basket when she was eight years old; her mother sold it at the market. It was a long trip from Cherry Brook to Halifax. They would get up early in the dark and walk to Dartmouth to catch the ferry to be in Halifax for the market opening at daybreak; it seemed like an even longer walk home at the end of the day.

In 1966, newspaper reporter Linda Levy interviewed Mrs. Riley at the market, known then as the Halifax City Market, held on Friday and Saturday mornings:

The grand old lady of the market is Mrs. Ethel Riley of Westphal, who had been running her stall through all seasons for 60 years. Her grandchildren help her gather the dandelion greens and ferns, the pussy willows and mayflowers that grow near her home. She makes her own baskets and does special handicraft for Christmas. A daughter, one of 13 children, carries on the marketing tradition. Sometimes she thinks she will retire, "but I'll stay as long as I'm able to get around." She will be 76 in August.⁷

In 1968, a decision was made to move the market from the police station to the Forum complex due to the building of Scotia Square. Barbara Hinds, a staff reporter with the Halifax *Mail-Star*, spoke with the three basketweavers:

Mrs. Edith Clayton of East Preston learned basket making from her mother, who in turn learned it from her mother and so back into the dim recesses of Negro history in North America. She has pet baskets, doll's cradles, hampers, shopping and laundry baskets, all fashioned in traditional woven strips of maple wood. Forty years ago, as a child of eight, she started making baskets and made her first trip with her mother to the family's market stall. She has been coming ever since. The aromatic pine garlands she makes for Christmas are eagerly bought up by early shoppers who want to decorate their homes in the old fashioned way — decking the halls with greenery. She makes about a yard in 15 minutes. "It's just like crocheting," said Mrs. Clayton, and showed her capable hands to prove it was done without blisters.

A neighbour, Mrs. John Glasgow, also of East Preston, runs the stall next to hers. Mrs. Glasgow lives on a farm and over the years she has sold field vegetables, potatoes, turnips, carrots, squash and corn and every kind of berry that grows locally — huckle, fox, blue, black and raspberries. "I wouldn't leave the market. I like coming here" she said.

The oldest stall holder is 78-year-old Mrs. Ethel Riley. She is almost a personal city market institution with 65 unbroken years at her stall, rising extra early on Friday and Saturday mornings to get to market to earn a modest living. She sells simple things now, bunches of flowers, Christmas wreaths, baskets and a little

garden produce. Mrs. Riley will not be going to the new market stalls, 'I think this is my last Christmas here.'⁸

A few years later, in December 1983, the market moved to the former Keith's Brewery on the Halifax waterfront. Mrs. Nancy Lucas, who sold at the market until her death in 2005, got up every Saturday morning at 4 AM to prepare for the journey from Lucasville, 15 kilometres away, to be ready for market opening at 6 AM. She attended the market from Easter to Christmas time when the weather was good for travelling, but "hibernated in the winter". Members of her family took turns driving her to town, her daughters Lene or Bernice, granddaughter Jane, and her son Angus. The City Market of Halifax Cooperative published a book celebrating the market, with anecdotes, recipes and stories of market vendors. Mary Mouzar relates the history and ritual of the market in her story of Mrs. Lucas.

Another veteran market vendor is the woman fondly known as the Market Matriarch, Mother Lucas, or simply, Mrs. Lucas. She is the latest of six generations of women basket weavers to sell at the Halifax Market. They have been coming since the mid-1800s when the market was located at Cheapside and Bedford Row near the ferry terminal. Her weekly routine is the same as it has been for years. Family members drive her to the market and help her carry in the splint baskets of different styles and sizes, a few home-made preserves, different types of bread, and a few vegetables from the garden, and plants such as mayflowers, Nova Scotia holly, evergreen wreaths and garlands.

She arranges everything on the patterned oil cloth-covered table. Before settling down in her chair, however, there is one more chore. She fills her little electric kettle with water she brings from her well at home, although a commercial size stainless sink sits next to her stall. It is time for a cup of tea while waiting for the arrival of the first customers.⁹

Clara Clayton-Gough has also sold her baskets at both the Halifax and Dartmouth Saturday markets and from her home in East Preston. (Figure 39) Pam Drummond Wall has sold her work at the Halifax Seaport Farmers' Market and through her website "A Touch of Maple". At Christmas, members of the Black community sell evergreen wreaths, garlands and colourful bunches of "holly berries", or Canada Holly, along with their home-made bread, pickles and hand-knit hats and mittens at the markets.



Figure 39. Clara Clayton-Gough of East Preston, selling her baskets at the Halifax Farmers Market, April 2000. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,377.

The farmers markets play an important role in preservation of the basket craft in the Black community.

Some of the earliest sketches and photographs of the Halifax city market show Black women selling baskets overflowing with mayflowers. Basket weaving for them was not an activity used to fill idle time; it was work aimed at bringing in money vital to the survival of the family.¹⁰

Women still sell directly to the public at the market, often taking orders from their customers. They are very happy to attend, because, after working at home in solitude all week, the market gives them the opportunity to meet friends and have direct contact with their customers. Basketweavers often describe being part of the market as being part of a large family.

Apart from the weekly Halifax Farmers Market, members of the Black community also sold their baskets and seasonal gatherings door-to-door in Halifax and Dartmouth and by street-side selling. (Figure 40) The women rarely, if ever, sell their baskets wholesale. Shopkeepers add a commission to each basket, raising the price to the consumer, who has a choice of buying much cheaper imported Asian baskets. Basketweaving is a very labour-intensive craft wherever it is practised. Contrary to popular belief, no baskets are machine-made; they are all made by hand. One basket may take a half-day to several days of work, depending on size. In an effort to speed up production, older weavers often “set up” a basket, making it to the point where all it needs is many rows of weaving to fill the middle. They are often given to the children to complete. Sometimes basketweavers use the wide splits to save time. Their grandmothers would have frowned, as they took great pride in weaving with finer narrow splits.



Figure 40. "Two Women Selling Mayflowers", W.R. Symons, watercolour, late 1960s. Dartmouth Heritage Museum, 76.53.2.

Black basketweavers rarely sign their work. Within the community, each weaver recognizes the work of others. Outside the community, however, the baskets are anonymous.¹¹ In response to national attention, Edith Clayton began to sign her work with "E.C." inside the handle. Other basketweavers will sign their work on request.

The Halifax Farmers Market provided not only a means of livelihood for many people, but also an opportunity of bringing together different basketweaving cultures in Nova

Scotia - the Mi'kmaq, Acadian and Black. Their baskets styles were very different, both in material and technique. The Mi'kmaq wove their splintwood baskets of ash, maple and poplar¹², the Acadians wove spruce roots on a hardwood frame¹³ while the Black women wove their ribbed baskets of red maple saplings.¹⁴ Individuals worked together and must have observed the other's basketry. An image taken about 1885 by Dartmouth photographer George Craig shows Mi'kmaq women sitting with a Black woman selling baskets at the market. (Figure 41) A later image, taken in 1891 by the surveyor E.R. Faribault in Elmsdale, NS, shows a Mi'kmaq camp surrounded by basketweaving debris with a Black woman included in the group. (Figure 42)



Figure 41. Market day in Halifax, NS about 1885. Mi'kmaq and a Black woman surrounded by baskets. Although none of these baskets is ribbed, this image does show interaction of the two cultures at the market. Photo: George H. Craig. Dartmouth Heritage Museum.



Figure 42. Mi'kmaq at Elmsdale, 1891. A young Black woman stands to the right of the wigwam door. Note the basketmaking debris in the foreground. Photo: E. R. Faribault. Geological Survey of Canada, Ottawa. PA 39851.

Market vendors also came from the small Acadian community of Chezzetcook, east of Dartmouth, which has a history of making a ribbed style of basket. There are no known market images showing the use of the Acadian basket, but several root baskets are on display at the Acadian House Museum in Chezzetcook. The museum collection includes two delightful images of large, sturdy Black and Mi'kmaw baskets on a truck returning from the Halifax market with smiling vendors; all their baskets are empty. (Figure 43)



Figure 43 Vendors returning home to Chezzetcook after market day in Halifax with all their baskets empty. Photographer and date unknown. Acadian House Museum, Chezzetcook, Nova Scotia.

With so many basketmakers at the market, it is fascinating that no one copied the style of the other. There may have been one or two experimenters, but on the whole, each cultural group remained true to its own traditional roots. These traditions are still evident in Atlantic Canada.

BLACK RIBBED BASKETS OF NOVA SCOTIA

“Your knife does not need to be sharp.” Edith Clayton

Styles

The most popular style of ribbed basket is the market basket, with a small X-shaped cross wrap joining the handle and rim elements, and an overhand handle. The second most popular style is the fruit basket, without the overhand handle; a variation is the church-offering basket with a long wooden handle.

Another style is a baby bassinet in which the intersection of handle and circles are off-centre. Weaving includes the bottom two quarters for the bed of the basket, as well as the smaller of the two top quarters for the hood of the cradle. Men added wooden rockers. This basket was made in many sizes; small for dolls, larger for babies. The latter are treasured and passed down within families.

Edith Clayton was well known for experimenting. Influenced by her customer’s requests, by repairing other baskets and by her curiosity, she created many other shapes — horn of plenty, tea tray, fishing creel, lampshades and an assortment of purses. (Figure 44) Her daughters continue experimenting by making wedding wishing wells and life-sized human figures.



Figure 44. Edith Clayton with her baskets under her favourite apple tree in East Preston. On her far left is a tall lampshade with market baskets, small cradle, fruit basket and small lampshade in the middle and a large tray on the right. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Material

Red maple (*Acer rubrum*), also known as swamp maple and brown maple, is common in Nova Scotia, growing on rich moist lands and along the borders of streams and swamps.¹ The men gather the wood. The women are very specific: it has to be straight and free of knots. The men cut a 1 to 1.5 metre (3 to 4 foot) section of the trunk of a sapling, 4 to 5 centimetres (1½ to 2 inches) in diameter, which has grown straight with no side branches and few knots. Trees growing near swampy areas tend to be dry and brittle, and useless for basket-weaving. Mrs. Clayton used to call this kind of wood “brickly”; the word sounds like wood splintering. The best trees for baskets grow on higher, drier ground. These can be cut at all times of the year, although they tend to be driest in mid-winter when the sap is down, making them more difficult to work.

Since the wood is split downwards, from upper to lower part of the tree, it is important to distinguish each end of the cut piece. To achieve this, the wood was cut on angle at the bottom and horizontally at the top.

The wood is stored outdoors on the ground and in the shade, so it will not dry out. It is best used fresh, or green, while still full of sap, but it may still be used after many weeks. Storing on a veranda or deck is not recommended.

Dyes

Women in the Black community use both commercial and natural dyes, especially at Easter time. Years ago, the most popular was the Diamond dye purchased either commercially or from the Mi'kmaq in Shubenacadie, who used it for dyeing both porcupine quills and wood splints. It was known to dye wood well. No longer available today, it has been replaced by RIT and Tintex dyes.

A popular natural dye continues to be alder bark, which gives a rich brown shade. The bark is stripped off the tree and boiled in water with a generous tablespoon of baking soda. The splits are added to the dye bath, or the entire basket is dipped. The longer the articles remain in the bath, the darker shade they become. Esther Drummond dyed her weaving splits a light shade of pink with birchbark (*Betula* sp.) in a similar way. (Figure 20)

Tools

The women use two tools: a heavy hunter's knife with a 10 to 15 cm (4 to 6 in) blade for halving and quartering the wood, and a lighter folding knife, for the rest. A pointed blade is more useful than a blunt one. The knives need not be sharp.

Step-by-step Construction

Market Basket

These instructions are written for a right-handed person, as Edith Clayton was right-handed. Apologies to the lefties; use a mirror image (go left when the directions go right and right when they indicate left) and your basket will turn out perfectly.

To make the rim and handle, split a piece of maple in half lengthwise by holding the top end in your two hands, pressing the bottom end against the left side of your chest using

your elbow. Wedge the blade of a hunter's knife across the top of the wood, through the centre pith, cutting the maple in half. (Figure 45)



Figure 45. Wedge the knife into the top of the wood, cutting in half. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection. Photo: Ron Merrick.

You may have noticed that the knife in this photo is a bread knife. On the day of photography, Mrs. Clayton could not find her hunter's knife so she had to substitute. She wanted me to assure people that she did not always use her bread knife to cut wood; I smile whenever I see this image and remember her sense of humour.

Using the knife to guide the cut along the centre or "heart", bend one half of the wood away from you with the left hand while pulling the other half towards you. The wood is not cut; the knife is used only as a guide to split. A good piece of maple, with pressure applied in the right places, will split without a knife after the initial cut. If the cut starts to run off centre, turn the maple 180° and continue, bending down on that half which previously was pulled up, and pulling up on the other. (Figure 46)



Figure 46. Halve the wood lengthwise, bracing it against the table. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

This may sound straightforward, but is quite the opposite. Rather than rely on the heavy knife, I find it easier to lay the sapling on the workshop floor and use a small hatchet as a wedge, driven into the centre near the top end. Hit with a hammer to start splitting in half and repeat at intervals down the length, following the split. I use this method for quartering as well. My arm muscles are not as developed as Mrs. Clayton's.

To quarter each halved piece, wedge the knife into the top and gently pull it apart with your hands, guiding the knife, while bracing the bottom against the floor or body. (Figures 47 and 48) Scrape off both the outer and inner layers of bark with a knife until the wood is white and shiny. (Figures 49 and 50)



Figure 47. Split the halved wood into two quarters. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 48. Split the quartered wood into two equal portions, bracing the end against the body and pulling away with the left hand. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 49. Scrape off both the inner and outer barks. Note position of wood in the hands and held against the body with the arm. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 50. Scrape to the inner wood. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Working on the quartered piece, cut out the dark central heartwood which is usually too dry to work. Wedge the jackknife into the top, marking it in half, with the knife blade parallel to the outer surface. Guide the knife gently down the grain of the wood, while pulling up with the knife hand and pulling down with the other, bracing the bottom end against your body with your elbow. (Diagram 1, Cut No.1) If the wood starts to run off the grain, turn it 180° and continue. Depending on the size of the wood, you may wish to cut a wide quarter in half width-wise making two manageable pieces of wood. (Diagram 1, Cut No.2)

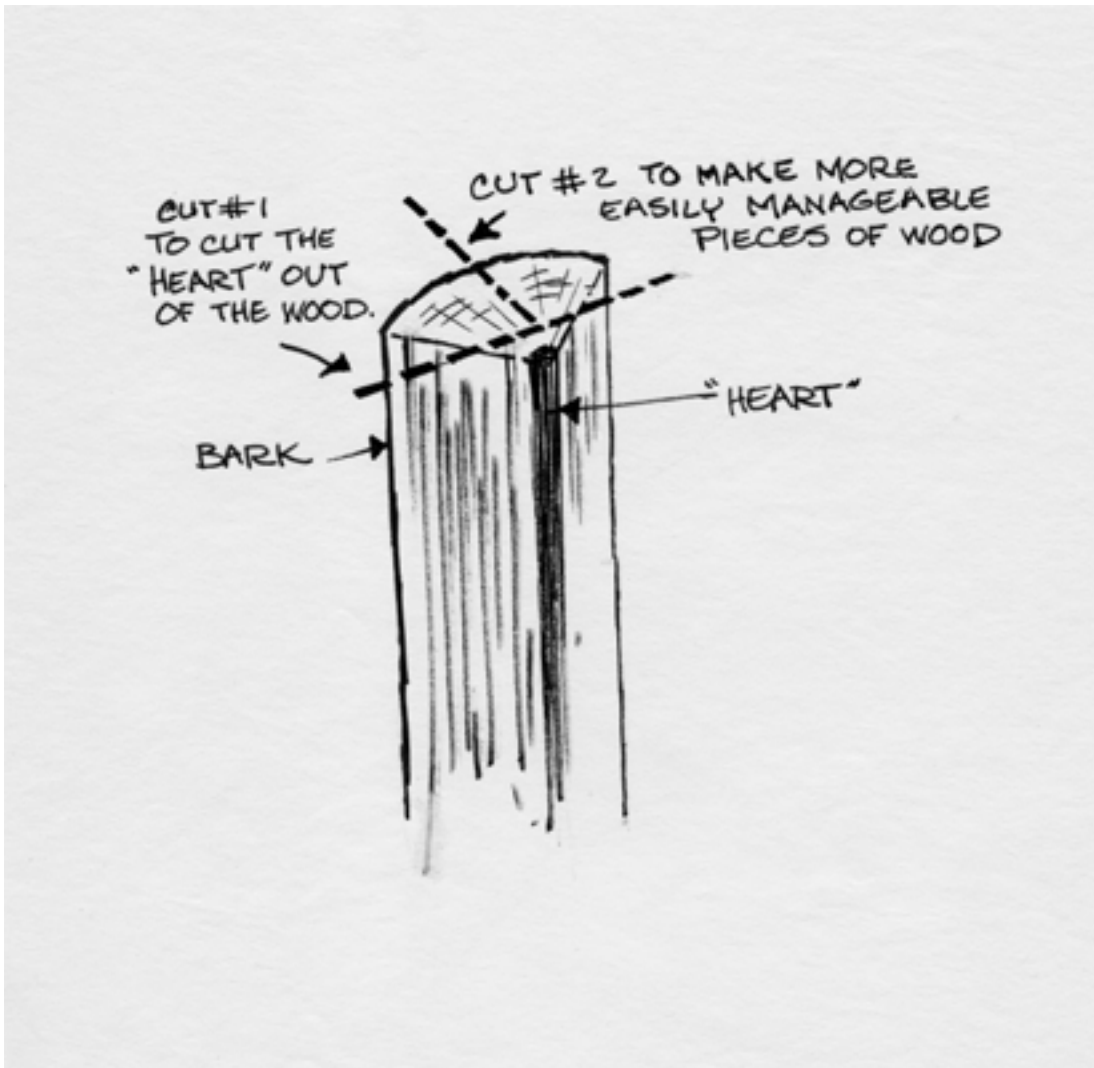


DIAGRAM 1

The remaining quarter is split into two thinner halves. The outer piece is for the handle and the weaving splits, while the inner piece is for ribs and rims.

The weaving splits, or strips, are long ribbon-like pieces of wood used for wrapping the rim and handle circles together and for the weft. Making splits of maple requires patience and experience. The width of the weaving splits should be proportionate to the size of basket: narrow splits for a small basket and wider for a larger one.

To make the weaving splits, first shave the edges of the wood so they are smooth and even their full length. Hold the top end in your two hands with the bottom pressed between the chest and left elbow. Wedge the knife into the top centre between the growth rings (parallel to the plane of the rings) thus dividing the wood in half. (Figures 51

and 52) Always split in half; do not attempt to split off single weavers. Hold the lower half between the forefinger and thumb of your left hand, bending it downward and away. Hold the knife in your right hand and gently guide it down the centre of the growth rings, pulling the upper half towards you. (Figure 53) The two pieces should separate quite easily. If the wood runs off the grain, turn it 180° and continue. Divide each piece again and again until the splits are thin and pliable by holding the two halves with the thumbs and forefingers and pulling up and out with equal pressure; the long end of the split held taut between the other fingers (or between the knees). (Figure 54) Trim the splits all the same width. Roll and store dry until needed. To make pliable for weaving, moisten for a few minutes in warm water.



Figure 51. Split each quarter into two equal pieces of wood. Note the position of the one end of the wood held between the two hands and the other end held against the body with the arm. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 52. A close-up of the position of the hands. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 53. The position of the piece of wood in the hands making the weaving split. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 54. Another way of making the weaving split. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection. Photo: Joleen Gordon

Step 1. Rim and Handle

The length of the rim and handle should suit the basket proportion. A small basket has a smaller, lighter handle, while a bigger basket has a thicker, heavier one. Cut about 10 to 15 cm (4 to 6 in) of thickness from interfacing sides of each end of both the rim and handle pieces so, when they are overlapped for that same distance, they are the same thickness as the rest of the circle. (Figure 55) Smooth the edges of the handle to fit comfortably in a hand. This is not necessary for the rim as it will be covered by weaving.



Figure 55. Cut some thickness out of each end of both the rim and handle pieces prior to overlapping. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Cut a notch out of the rim, 5 to 8 cm (2 to 3 in) from one end. (Figure 56) Bend into a full circle with the ends overlapping 8 to 10 cm (3 or 4 in) and the notch in the centre of the overlap. Cut a notch into the uncut end to match the first. (Figure 57) Some basketweavers cut several notches on both sides of the overlap.



Figure 56. Cut a notch crosswise. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 57. Overlap the two ends and cut a notch to match the first. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

To wrap the two ends of the rim together, insert a split between them at about the outer edge of the overlap (Figure 58) and wrap the split around and around the two ends, pulling it up tightly in the centre of the notched area. (Figure 59) Repeat wrapping to the end of the overlapped area. To end, insert the split through the next-to-last circle of wrap (Figure 60), and pull up tightly; cut off close to the wrap. This join may be made stronger with a small nail at the centre of this overlap.



Figure 58. Insert a split under one end of the overlap. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 59. Pull the split into the notch. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 60. Finish off the wrap by slipping the split into the last circle of wrap. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Repeat to make the handle. Bend the handle and rim circles into the desired shapes. Position the overlap of the handle circle towards the ground. This lower part of the handle forms the bottom rib of the basket, and should be flattened so that the basket will sit flat. Position the overlap of the rim to one side, left or right. The rim should be symmetrical whether circular or rectangular. (Figure 61) Insert the rim circle *inside* the handle circle. (Figure 62)



Figure 61. Handle circle on the left, rim circle on the right. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 62. Insert rim circle *inside* the handle circle, at right angles. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

To wrap the rim and handle circles together, hold the intersection together with your left hand, and insert a split between the rim and the handle. (Figure 63) Wrap the split around the intersection in the form of a cross: up and across the intersection to the left side of the handle, down around back of the rim, up and across the intersection to the right of the handle, down around back of the rim, and up and over to the left of the handle, retracing the first step. Repeat these wraps three or four times loosely but firmly. (Figure 64 and Diagram 2) Finish the wrap by inserting the split from below under the cross created by the wrapping and pull up gently. Cut off close to the wrap. (Figures 65 and 66) Repeat on the opposite side.



Figure 63. Insert a split between rim and handle circles. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 64. Wrap rim and handle together in a cross wrap; see Diagram 2. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

HANDLE RIM WRAP

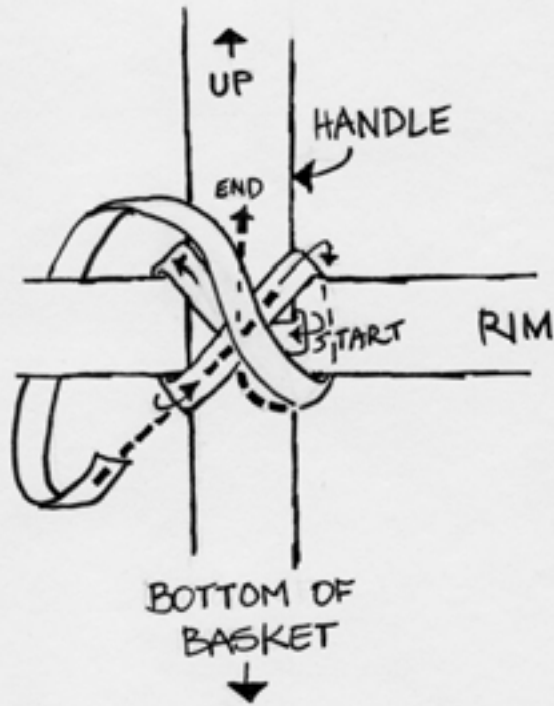


DIAGRAM 2



Figure 65. Front view of cross wrap showing end of split inserted underneath cross and cut off. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 66. Back view of cross wrap. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Step 2. Ribs

The ribs are long, narrow pieces of wood with long, tapering points. Cut the ribs from any piece of the maple. They can be smoothed if desired, but this is not necessary as they will be covered by the weaving splits. For a small basket cut fine narrow ribs; for a larger basket make thicker, stronger ones.

Eight ribs are now inserted into the cross wrap — four on each side; inserted into the wrap in a definite sequence.

Pair Number 1: these ribs on either side of the basket are the same length as the side rim. They are inserted into the upper part of the wrap to lie directly under the rim, not alongside. Insert one end of the sharpened rib into the wrap as far as it will go. (Figure 67) Bend the rib around to the other side of the basket and break off to the desired length, leaving enough to insert into the wrap. Sharpen the end of the rib and insert into the wrap. Add the other rib to the other side of the basket. (Figure 68)



Figure 67. Insert one rib of pair 1 into cross wrap. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 68. Add the paired rib to the other side of the basket. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Pair Number 2: these ribs are the same length as the lower part of the handle, which is the main bottom supporting rib of the basket. These are inserted between the lower part of the wrap and the lower part of the handle, not on top. (Figure 69) As with the first pair, insert one sharpened rib end into the wrap, bend the rib around to the other side of the basket, judge the length needed for insertion and break off. Sharpen the end and insert into the wrap. Repeat for the other side. (Figure 70)



Figure 69. Insert one rib of pair 2 into lower part of cross wrap alongside the lower handle. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 70. Insert second rib 2 into wrap alongside handle-bottom on other side. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Pair Number 3: these ribs lie directly on top of the first pair at the point of insertion. They are slightly longer than the first pair because they form the sides of the basket. As before, working on either side, insert one end of each rib into the wrap, bend the free end around to the other side creating the desired shape, break off, sharpen and insert into the wrap directly on top of rib 1.

Pair Number 4: these ribs form the bottom corners of the basket. They are inserted into the wrap directly on top of the second pair (rib 2). For each one, insert the sharpened end into the wrap, bend the free end around to the other side forming the corner, break off to the desired length, sharpen and insert into the wrap directly on top of rib 2. (Figure 71) Diagram 3 shows insertion of all ribs.



Figure 71. Overall view with first set of ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection

POSITION OF THE FIRST SET OF RIBS

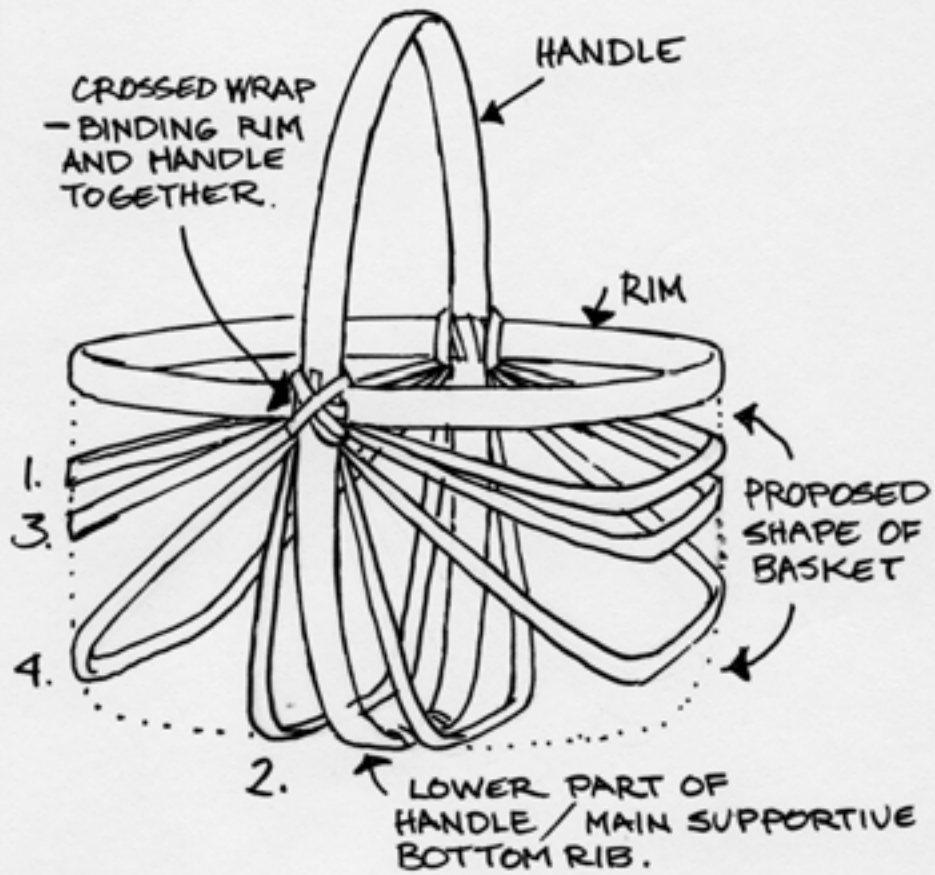


DIAGRAM 3

Step 3. Weaving

The ribs are too close together to begin weaving them over and under each one, so they must be woven in pairs for a few rows. Insert a split between the rim and the uppermost rib. (Figure 72) Weave the split over the two uppermost ribs (1 and 3). Twist the split to the back of the work and weave behind the two lower ribs on one side (2 and 4), behind the lower part of the handle and behind the two lower ribs on the other side (2 and 4). Diagram 4.



Figure 72. Insert a split between rim and uppermost pair of ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

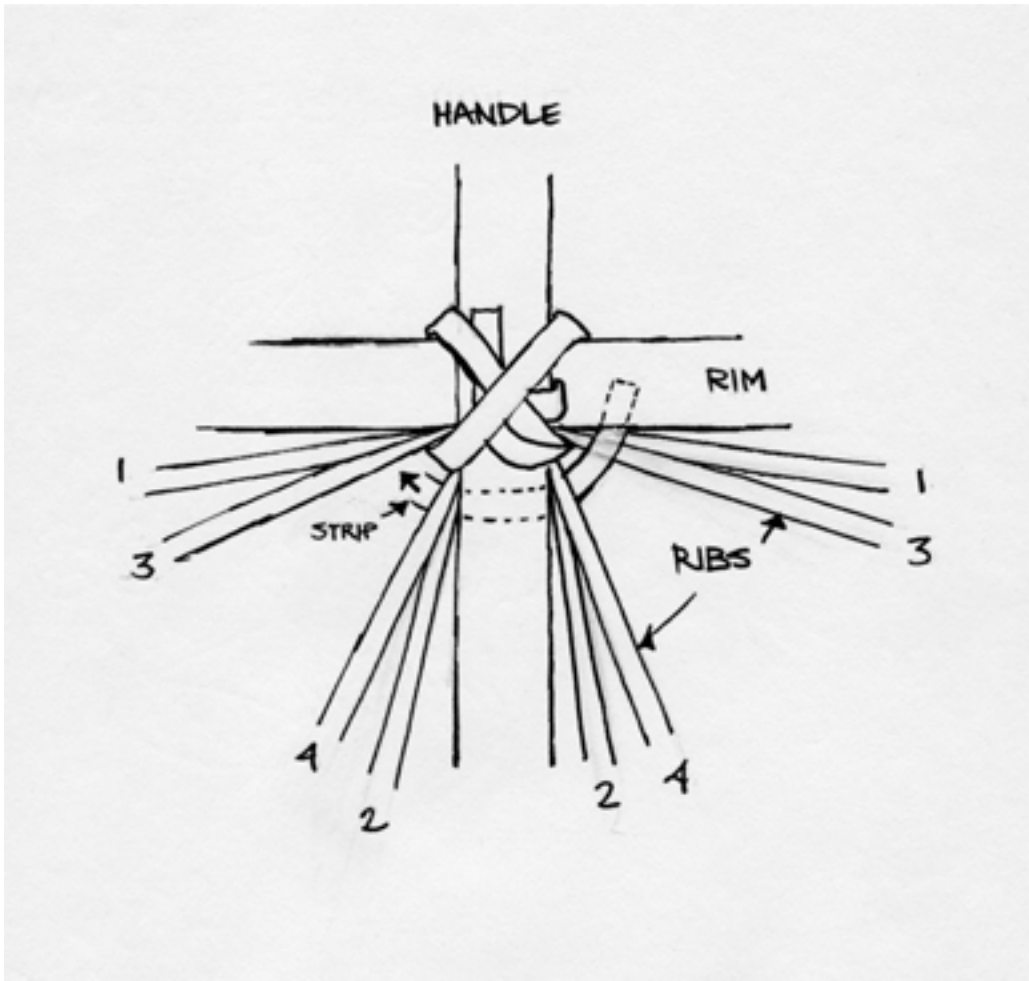


DIAGRAM 4

Bring the weaving split to the front of the work and twist it over the two upper ribs (1 and 3) and over the rim. Diagram 5.

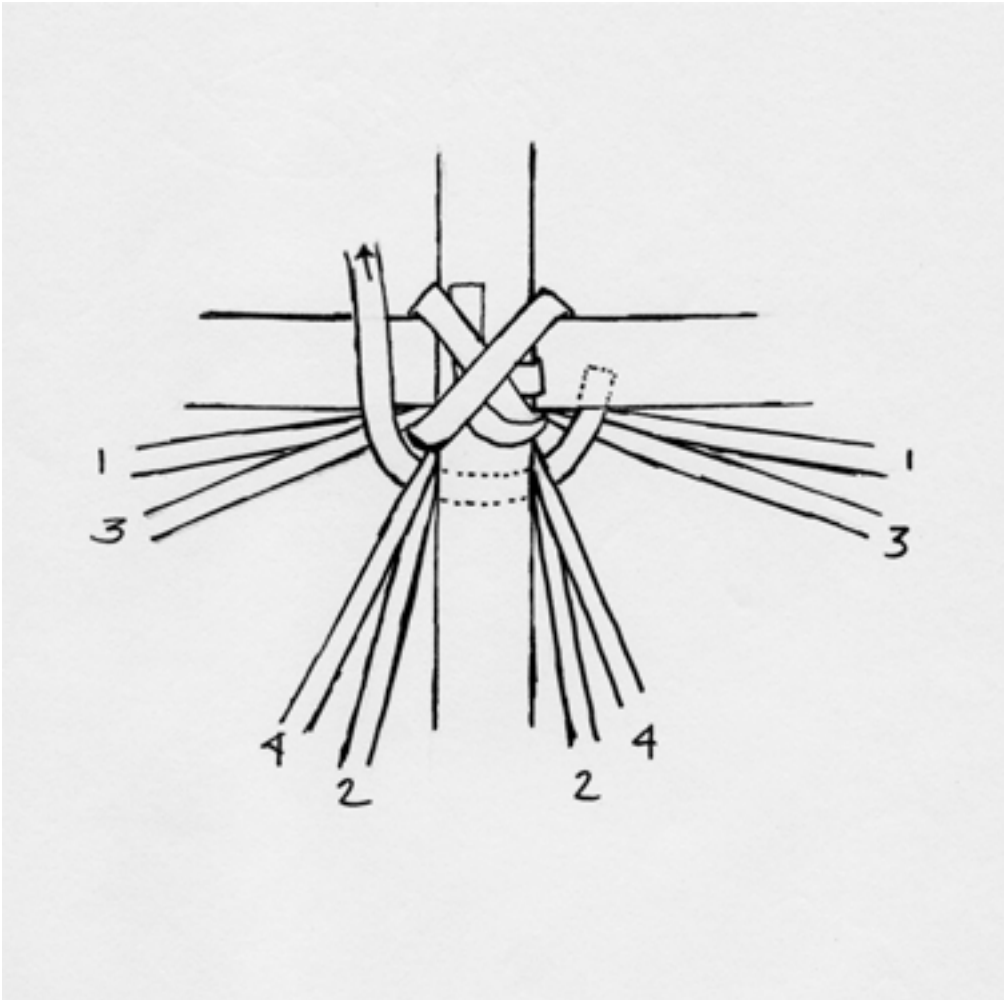


DIAGRAM 5

Wrap the split around the rim and the two uppermost ribs (1 and 3). Diagram 6.

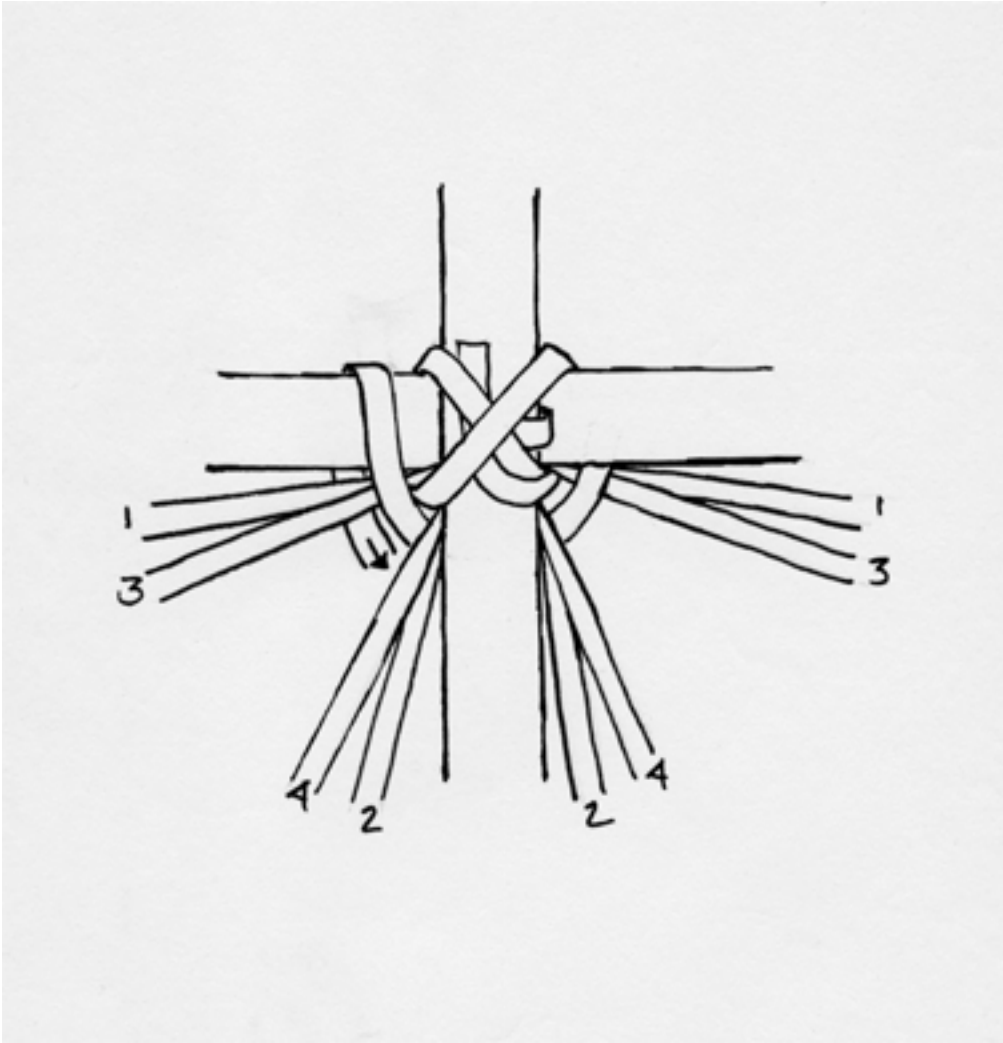


DIAGRAM 6

Bring the split to the front of the work and twist it over the two pairs of lower ribs (2 and 4) and the lower part of the handle. Diagram 7. The split is twisted so it lies flat against the wood. This is not shown in the diagrams as it might confuse the reader. Look carefully at the photographs and you will see how the split is twisted. These twists are only made in the beginning to keep the weaving tight.

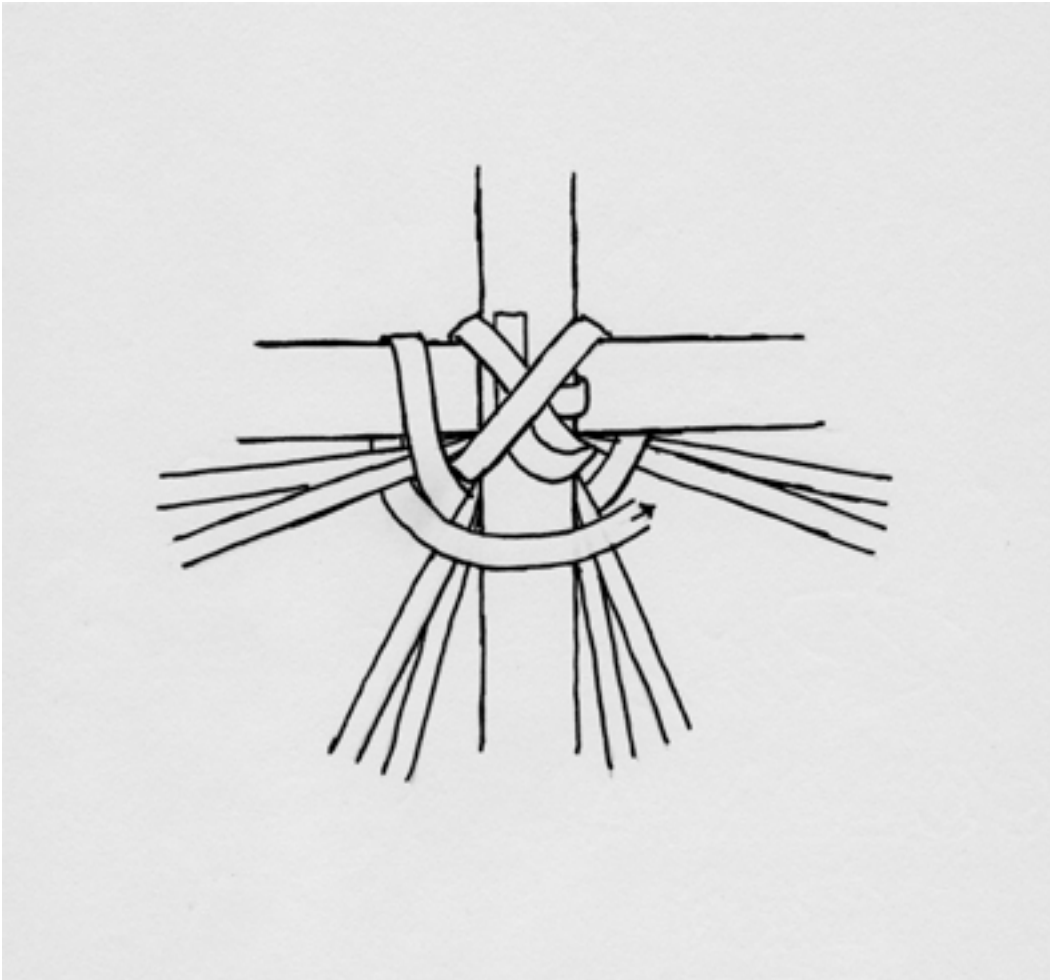


DIAGRAM 7

Take the split to the back of the work and behind the two uppermost ribs (1 and 3) and the rim. Wrap the split around the rim twice. Diagram 8.

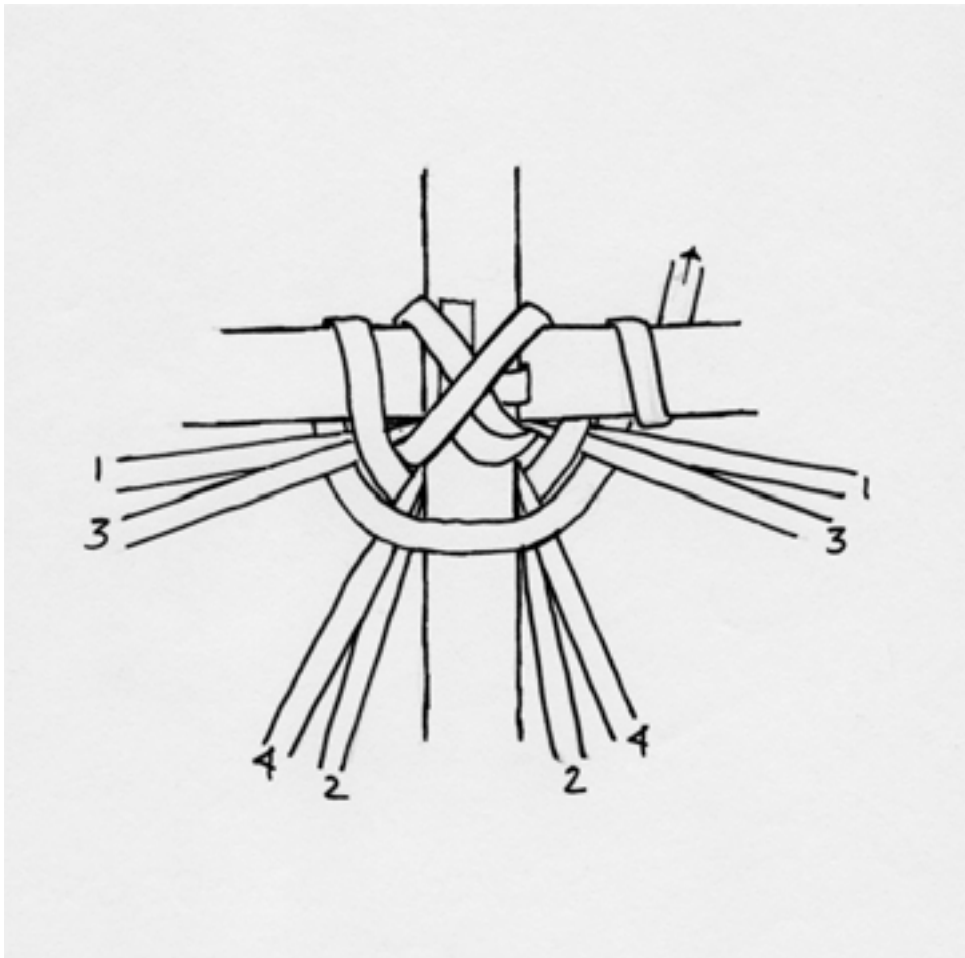


DIAGRAM 8

Weave the split under the two upper ribs (1 and 3) (Figure 73), over the two lower ribs (2 and 4), under the lower part of the handle, over the two lower ribs on the other side of the basket (2 and 4), under the two upper ribs (1 and 3), and over the rim twice.
Diagram 9.



Figure 73. Completion of two rows of weaving; begin to weave the ribs in pairs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

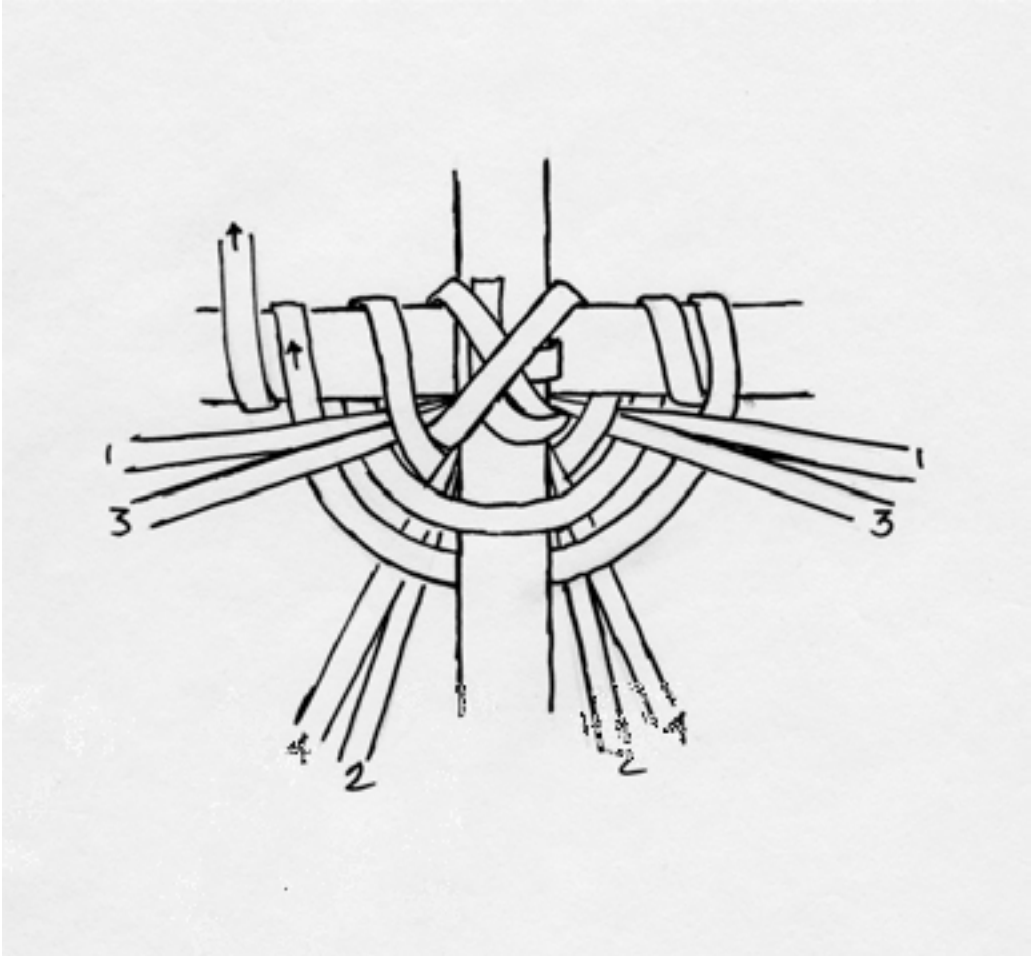


DIAGRAM 9

Weave the split back to the other side of the basket, reversing the under and over weaves of the previous step to give the over-one, under-one pattern: weave the split over the two upper ribs (1 and 3), under the two lower ribs (2 and 4), over the lower part of the handle, under the two lower ribs (2 and 4), over the two upper ribs (1 and 3) and under the rim. Diagram 10.

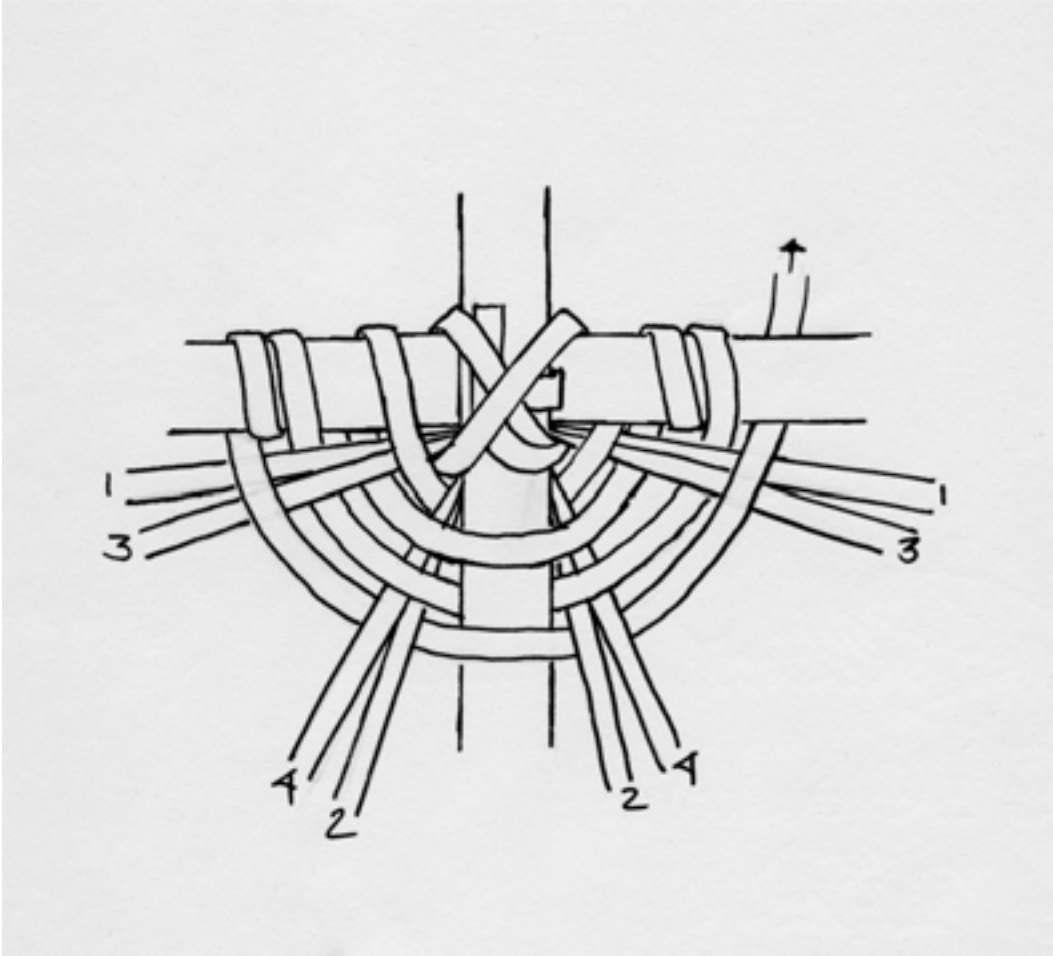


DIAGRAM 10

Weave the split through the ribs and the bottom of the handle as separate units. (Figure 74) Add a new weaver by overlapping the new end with the old weaver for the space of three to four ribs. Continue to weave on either side of the basket until the space between the ribs is a little larger than the width of the split, usually the eighth row of weaving. (Figure 75)



Figure 74. Weave the ribs separately. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 75. Basket with 8 rows of weaving. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Step 4. Second Set of Ribs

More ribs are needed to fill out the shape of the basket. Four ribs are added to each side, eight in all. Insert two ribs (see Diagram 11, where these two ribs are labelled 1*) to lie alongside the first set of ribs, one on each side. The length of these ribs depends on the shape. As with the earlier ribs, insert one sharpened end alongside the desired rib, bend the free end to the other side, break off to the desired length, sharpen and insert. Add two ribs (2*), one each alongside rib 2 on either side of the basket. No ribs are added to rib 3. Add four ribs (4*), one on either side of rib 4 on each side of the basket. These ribs form the corners. (Figures 76 and 77; Diagram 11) Continue weaving on either side, separating the new ribs gently. (Figure 78)

POSITION OF THE SECOND SET OF RIBS

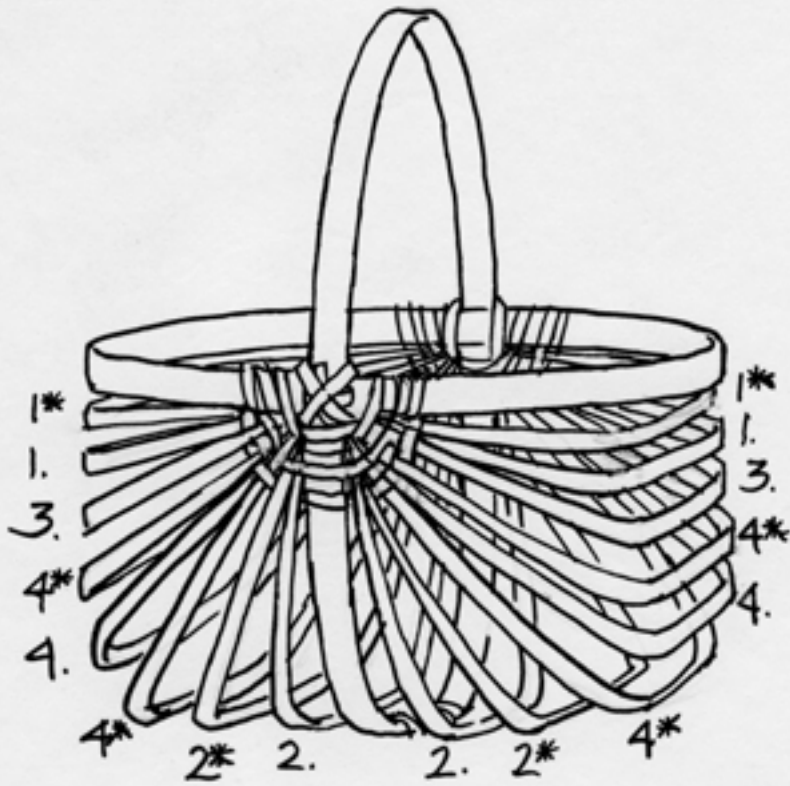


DIAGRAM 11



Figure 76. Right side with complete second set of ribs. Left side has only first set. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

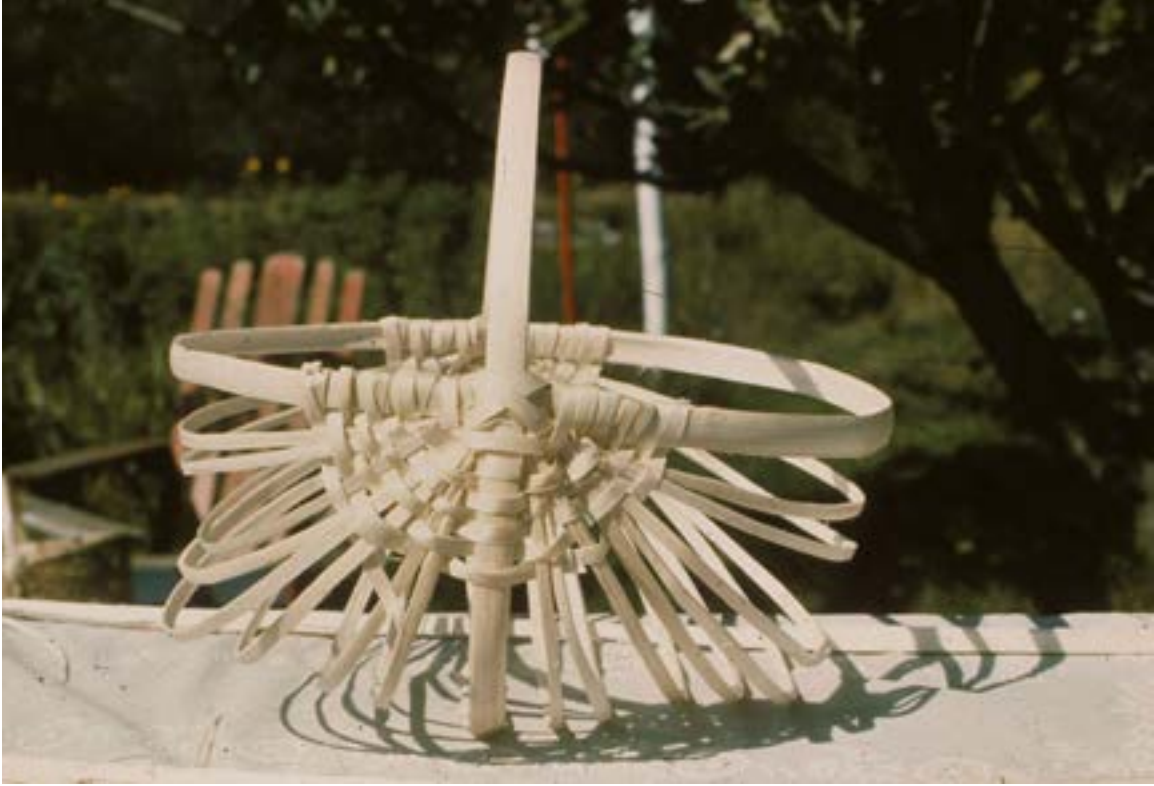


Figure 77. Both sides with complete second set of ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 78. Weave the second set of ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Step 5. Third Set of Ribs

Depending on the shape and the size of the basket, add a third set of ribs if the space between the ribs becomes greater than the width of the splits. (Figure 79) Add the same number of ribs to each side in symmetrical spaces.

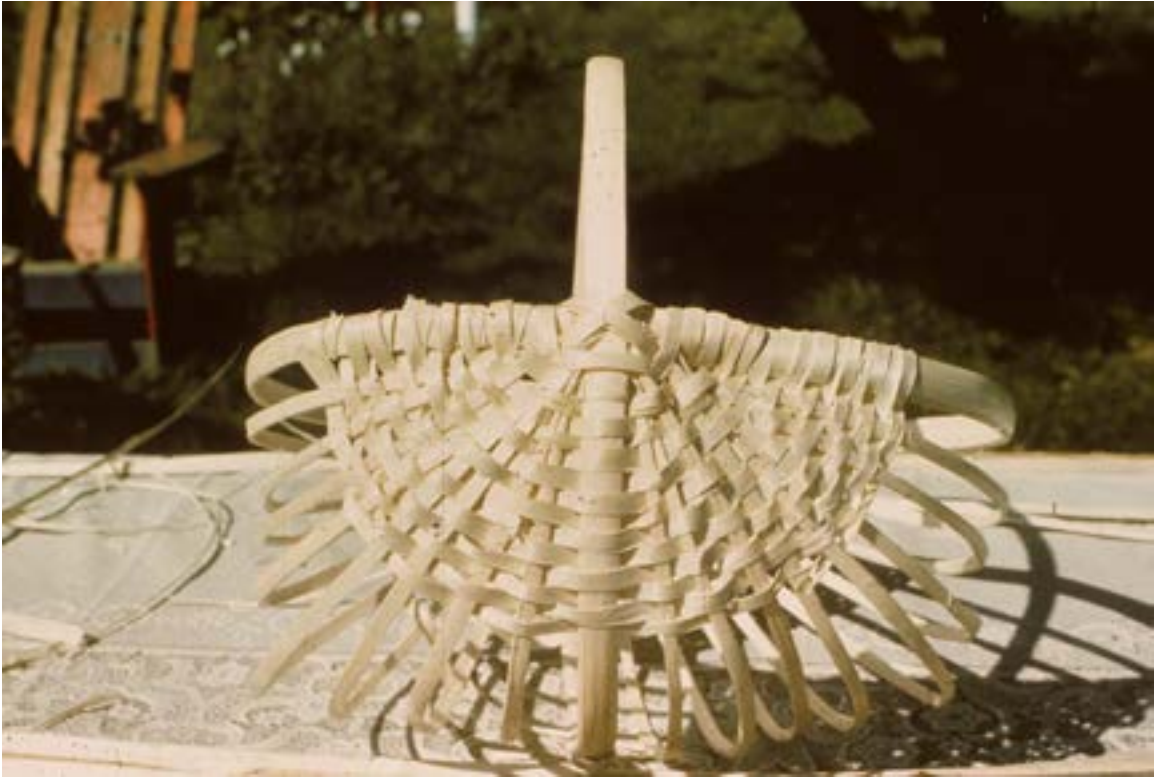


Figure 79. The basket needs a third set of ribs, due to uneven spacing. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Step 6. Turnback Weaving

If the basket is melon-shaped and perfectly symmetrical, the rows of weaving on either side will be parallel and will meet at the centre line. However, if the basket is not melon-shaped but angular, having straight sides and a flat bottom, the rows of weaving on either side will not be parallel. To make them parallel at the centre line, “turnback weaving” is necessary. A turnback is created by turning the weaving split back over one of the ribs in the other direction, instead of completing the row by weaving it around the rim. These turnbacks are usually made on each side close to the wraps. Hold the basket by the handle with the two wraps on either side with the as-yet-unwoven area of the basket facing you. Imagine two vertical lines, starting from the last two rows of weaving on the rim on either side, running parallel down to the bottom. The two triangular areas, to the left and right of those lines, must be filled in with turnback weaving. (Diagrams 12 and 13)

PLACEMENT OF TURNBACKS

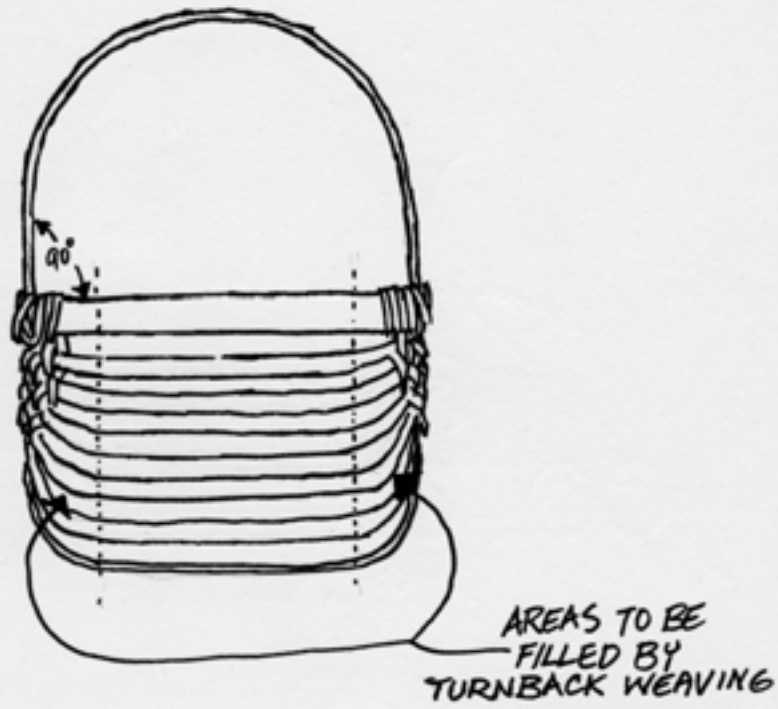


DIAGRAM 12



DIAGRAM 13

Make the first turnback on the rib nearest the rim on one side. Weave the split around the bottom, and turn back on the matching rib nearest the rim on the other side. Continue to weave in this way, turning back on consecutive ribs or every second rib depending on the area to be filled. Make only one turnback on each rib, more creates a large hole. On the other side, turn back on the corresponding ribs to make the two rows of weaving parallel. (Figure 80) Continue to weave on either side as before, bringing the splits around the turnbacks, pulling up tightly to close the holes as much as possible. (Figure 81) Wrap the split around the rim twice. This final row of weaving completes one set of turnbacks. The process may have to be repeated to align the two rows of weaving.



Figure 80. Completed turnbacks on corresponding ribs on both sides. The rows of weaving are now parallel. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 81. Weave alongside turnbacks. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Step 7. Completing the Basket

Fill in the central area with parallel rows of weaving. (Figure 82) As the weaving on each side approaches the middle, gently separate the completed rows to add as many rows as possible; the splits tend to shrink a little as they dry. The weaving is complete when the last rows alternate with each other in the basketweave pattern. (Figure 83 and Diagram 14) Overlap the last split 10 to 12 cm (4 to 5 in); cut off the end. (Figure 84)



Figure 82. The rows of weaving are parallel in the centre. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 83. Weave the last row in an over-one, under-one pattern. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



DIAGRAM 14



Figure 84. Overlap the last split with the already woven split for 3 or 4 ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Finish the basket by covering the holes created by the turnbacks. Weave a short split under a rib just above the turnback, then over the triangular hole created by the turnback, then under the rib just below. (Figure 85)



Figure 85. To cover the triangular hole created by the turnback, insert a short split under the rib above the hole, weave it over the hole, then slip it under the rib below the hole and cut off. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

A large basket may be made stronger with a small nail at the centre of the rim-handle crossed wrap. The basket is complete. (Figure 86)



Figure 86. Edith Clayton with a completed market basket (now in the History Collection, Nova Scotia Museum, 2001.5). Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Baby Cradle

The baby cradle is constructed in a similar manner to the market basket. (Figure 87) To make the framework, intersect two circles of wood, for the rim and for the hood/main bottom rib, not at their centres but offset to one side. (Figure 88) On a market basket, the two lower quarters of the frame sphere are woven. For the baby cradle, the two lower quarters form the bed, while one upper quarter makes the hood; all three are woven together.



Figure 87. Edith Clayton with a small version of her baby cradle made for dolls.
Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 88. Intersect the two circles of wood, not at their centres but off to one side. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Insert the ribs into the cross wrap in these three quarters following directions for the market basket, a total of four ribs in each quarter. (Figure 89) Weave the three quartered areas until spaces between the ribs are large enough to require more ribs. (Figure 90) Add the second set following directions for the market basket (Diagram 11), one alongside each of the two shorter pairs of ribs in each quarter, and two (one on either side) of the longer, more central rib. Continue weaving as before. (Figure 91)



Figure 89. Add ribs to three of the four quarters. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 90. Time to insert the second set of ribs when spaces between ribs widen. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

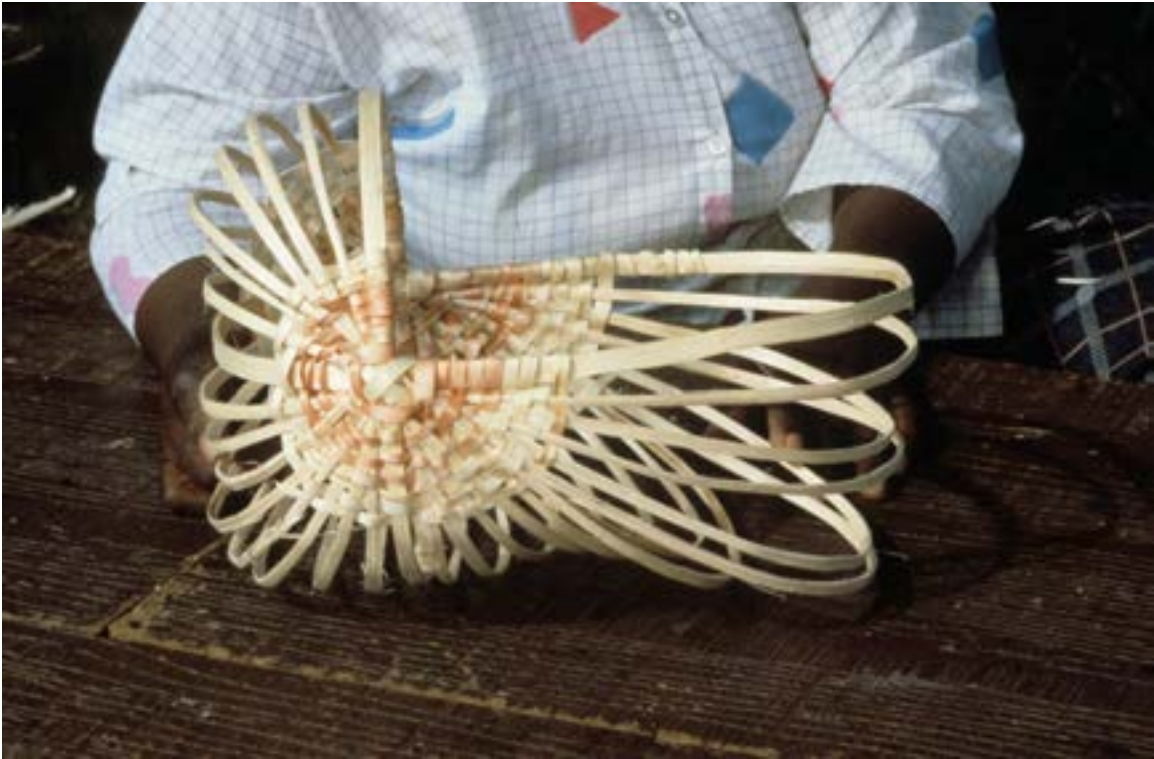


Figure 91. Add a second set of ribs, with more to form the shape. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

The cradle will require more ribs as weaving progresses, especially in the larger area of the bed. The area to be filled in is not parallel (Figure 92), so quite a few sets of turnbacks will be required to create a parallel space, with the final row of weaving in the centre. (Figure 93) To finish, add two wooden rockers joined by a central spreader and nail to a wide piece of wood on the inside. (Figures 94, 95 and 96)



Figure 92. The two rows of weaving on either side are not parallel, hence the need for turnbacks. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

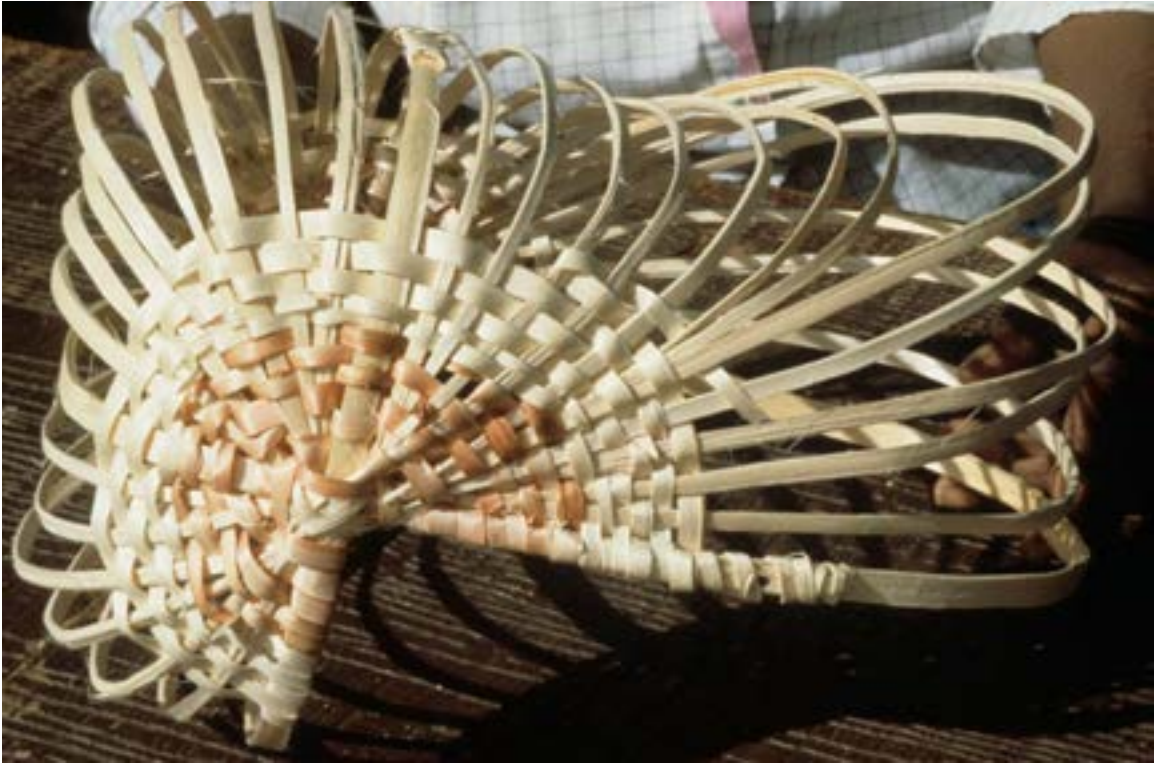


Figure 93. Make turnbacks on consecutive ribs, beginning from a bottom rib to the rim on each side until edges of the unwoven area are parallel. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 94. Add two wooden rockers to the outside of the basket. Photo: Joleen Gordon.



Figure 95. The rockers are nailed to a flat piece of wood inside. Photo: Joleen Gordon.



Figure 96. The completed baby cradle. Photo: Joleen Gordon.

The cradle depicted here is for a doll. Edith Clayton and other weavers have made similar baskets for their own babies. These treasured cradles are passed down from one generation to another. (Figures 30 and 138)

Fruit Basket

The fruit basket is the market basket without a handle. (Figure 97) To make the framework, overlap the ends of a circle and wrap with a weaving split. (Figures 98 and 99) Add the main bottom rib at the spot where the two ends of the rim frame overlap. Cut the rib but do not taper as for the market basket; thin one end 15-20cm (6-8 inches) so it can bend around the rim. (Figure 100) To hold this rib to the rim circle, insert a weaving split under the rib against the rim and make a cross as explained for the rim-handle cross wrap in the market basket, but use the end of the split to bind together the rib and its tail, two or three times. Secure the split under one of the bindings and cut off. (Figure 101) Bend the other end of the rib to the other side of the basket, dividing the rim circle in half. Thin so it can be bent over the rim, and secure in place with another cross wrap.



Figure 97. Edith Clayton with a completed fruit basket. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 98. Overlap a circle of wood, cut a notch and begin wrapping with a split. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 99. The completed rim circle. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 100. Bend the thinned end of the bottom rib around the rim. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 101. Bind the bottom rib to the rim with a cross wrap securing the two parts of the rib. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Add ribs to the two bottom quarters of the basket in the same way as for the market basket. (Figure 102) Add four ribs to the cross wrap on each side. (Figure 103) The length and shape of the ribs creates the shape. (Figure 104)



Figure 102. Edith Clayton sharpening a rib with precision. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 103. The first set of ribs (two sets of 2 pairs) added to each side of the basket in the same manner as for the market basket. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 104. The ribs create the basket shape. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Weave the ribs as for the market basket, first in groups of four, then pairs, before separating into singles. (Figures 105-108) After a few rows of weaving, the space between the ribs increases making it necessary to add a second set of ribs. (Figure 109) Continue weaving a little on each side towards the centre. (Figure 110) Insure that the bottom is flat. Always hold the basket so that the rows of weaving can be pulled towards you, in order to weave them tightly. (Figure 111) As with the market basket, turnbacks may be necessary to insure the centre area is woven parallel, and the last row of weaving will be along the centre line. (Figure 112)



Figure 105. To begin weaving, slip the weaver between the uppermost rib and the rim. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 106. First weave the ribs and rim together as a unit. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 107. Weave the ribs in pairs, treating the bottom of the handle as one unit. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 108. Weave the ribs singly. Requires a second set of ribs as the space between ribs widens. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 109. A second set of ribs on left side. The right side needs rib 2* for a total of 7 ribs on each side. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 110. Continue to weave on both sides towards the middle. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 111. Hold the basket with the cross towards you so the weaving can be pulled tightly toward each cross. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 112. The completed fruit basket. Edith Clayton added a small nail to at the centre of the cross warp, for strength. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Women of the Black community have made several baskets in this style, to which the men have attached long wooden handles for use as church offering baskets. They have seen many years of service in community churches. (Figure 113)



Figure 113. Church offering baskets, 1991, 25 x 23 x 24 cm, handle 51 cm; 18 x 18 x 25 cm, handle 38 cm, made by Clara Clayton-Gough. East Preston United Baptist Church, East Preston, Nova Scotia. Photo: Joleen Gordon.

Horn-of-Plenty/Cornucopia

The rim of the horn-of-plenty, or Thanksgiving cornucopia (Figure 114), is made of a flattened circle to sit on a table. (Figure 115) Add ribs around the circle, in the same way as the bottom rib of the fruit basket, so the entire rim is covered. Each rib is a long piece of wood, with one end thinned to a 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 in) tail so it can be used to make a cross wrap, joining it to the rim, while the other end is sharpened so it will taper into the cone-like shape of the basket. Place the rib on the rim circle with the thinned tail projecting down to the left (facing the weaver). (Figure 116) Bring the tail up across the rim to the right (Figure 117), then down behind the rim and up across to the left making a cross on the rim. Wrap two or three times on top of this cross and finish by slipping the end under the cross. (Figure 118)



Figure 114. Horns-of-plenty or Cornucopias; one has a temporary brace to create a turned-up shape. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 115. Make the rim circle of the cornucopia with a flat side so it will not roll. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 116. Add a rib by placing it on the rim with a 15 to 20 cm (6 to 8 inch) tail. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 117. Wrap the tail over the rim in the form of a cross. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 118. Finish the wrap by slipping the split under the cross. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Add another rib to the rim and slip alongside the other. Continue this way adding ribs all around the rim circle. (Figure 119) The ribs do not all have to be the same length, because the basket will taper to a cone shape, requiring some of the lengths to be cut away. Make sure when adding ribs, that every third or fourth one is the full length of the basket.



Figure 119. Add ribs until they are evenly spaced around the rim. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Add a second wrapping split to the rim by slipping the end under a cross and covering it with another cross wrap. (Figure 120) Wrap the split around the rim in between the crosses adding a new split when needed. (Figure 121) Continue all around the whole rim, covering both the original rib crosses and the rim. (Figure 122) In these photos, you will notice this split is darker than the original ones. Edith Clayton dyed this with alder bark.



Figure 120. Cover the rim and the cross wraps with another split by slipping the end under one of the crosses. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection. .



Figure 121. Add a new wrapping split. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 122. Make another cross on top of the existing cross wrap, and wrap the rim in between the crosses. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

Once the entire rim has been covered, use the tail end of the same split to begin weaving around the ribs in the familiar over-one, under-one basketweave pattern. (Figure 123) The conical shape of the basket is created by bringing the ribs closer together, weaving over two at times, and cutting ribs out as the conical shape gets smaller and smaller. (Figure 124) At the very end, weave back and forth over two ribs. (Figure 125) To create the turned-up shape of the end, tie a string around the end and loop back to the desired shape while the basket dries.



Figure 123. Begin weaving the ribs in an over-one, under-one pattern. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 124. Join two ribs together, then cut out one rib to create a conical shape. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.



Figure 125. Finish by weaving back and forth over two ribs. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection.

APPENDIX 1

Baskets from the Black Community

All basket dimensions are measured in centimetres, taken with the cross wrap facing the viewer, height (including the handle) x width x depth (across the basket, from wrap to wrap).



Figure 126. Market basket, 24.55 x 25 x 25 cm, woven by Irene Selena Sparks Drummond., date unknown. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,211 # 5.



Figure 127. Christmas-tree basket, 8 x 9 x 12 cm, made by Edith Clayton, 1986. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,626 # 9.



Figure 128. Lidded sewing basket of red maple, 36 x 24 x 18 cm, woven by Edith Clayton, 1976. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,623 # 6.



Figure 129. Small tea tray of red maple, 21 x 21 x 21 cm, woven by Edith Clayton, about 1960. This is not a traditional style of the Black community but made in response to a market customer's request to copy a German tray. The bottom is a solid wood circle. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 01.06.03. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,626 # 1.



Figure 130. Lampshade, 34 x 34 x 33 cm, woven by Edith Clayton about 1960. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 96.52, Nova Scotia Museum N-24,622 # 5.



Figure 131. Edith Clayton loved to make what she called “experiments”. These are a few created about 1970 (left to right): 12 x 12 x 21 cm; 10 x 6 x 6.5 cm; 9 x 5 x 6.5 cm; (foreground) 2.5 x 2 x 8.5 cm. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 01.06.04. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,626 # 7.



Figure 132. "Fish-mouth" basket, 35 x 19 x 45 cm, made by Edith Clayton, 1975. Another experiment. Nova Scotia Museum History Collection (Nova Scotia Centre for Craft and Design Collection) B75.10, Nova Scotia Museum N-24,622 # 11.



Figure 133. Purse basket, 20 x 27 x 19 cm, woven by Edith Clayton, about 1970. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,212 #11.



Figure 134. Purse, 19 x 25 x 27 cm, woven by Edith Clayton, date unknown. This is a copy of the popular English "ose" or hen basket. Her daughter Pam remembers that some women lined their baskets with cloth. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,575 # 8.



Figure 135. Purse-style basket with rim painted yellow, 31 x 31 x 17.5 cm, weaver and date unknown. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 01.06.05. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,724 # 4.



Figure 136. A market basket with an off-centre handle, 32 x 41 x 32.5 cm, made by Edith Clayton in 1988. She wanted to see if she could make a market basket that could be carried closer to the body. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 01.06.06. Nova Scotia Museum, N-25,575 # 11.



Figure 137. Two-hooded doll cradle, 32 x 56 x 34 cm, made by Edith Clayton for a daughter who had many dolls, about 1950. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum, N-25,212 # 8.



Figure 138. The last baby cradle, 67 x 97 x 70 cm, woven by Edith Clayton for her grandson, 1987. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,576 # 4.



Figure 139. Two small baskets, 4 x 3.5 x 5 cm and 4.5 x 5 x 6.5 cm. The one on the left was made by Edith Clayton on the right by the author, about 1975. We challenged one other to make a small basket; she won! Mrs. Clayton always said smaller baskets were tedious and the scale of work demanded more patience. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,624 # 6.



Figure 140. Red-maple fishing creel, 27 x 14 x 16 cm, woven by the author in class with Mrs. Clayton, about 1970. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-24,621 # 6.



Figure 141. Hamper-style basket, 25.5 x 28 x 17 cm, woven by Nancy Lucas, 1998. Purchased at the Halifax Farmers Market. Black Cultural Centre for Nova Scotia, 01.06.07. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,575 # 4.



Figure 142. Easter basket of dyed red maple, 36 x 31 x 25 cm, woven by Clara Clayton-Gough of East Preston, 1991. Signed inside the handle. Nova Scotia Museum, History Collection 91.24.2; Nova Scotia Museum N-24,623 #8 a.



Figure 143. Market basket, 27 x 28 x 28 cm, woven by Vivian Clayton MacPhee, 1993. She used chemical dyes to colour some splits. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,575 # 4.



Figure 144. Wishing well, 26 x 28 x 57 cm, woven by Pam Drummond Wall. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,725 # 2.



Figure 145. Wedding favour, 8.5 x 8.5 x 11.5 cm. Mrs. Clayton's daughters Vivian MacPhee, Pam Drummond Wall and Althea Tollivar made over a hundred of these favours for the wedding of a granddaughter in 1998. Private collection. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,575 # 11.



Figure 146. Market basket, 35 x 37 x 29 cm, woven by Angus Lucas, son of Nancy Drummond Lucas, 2001. The maple splits have been dyed green and blue with commercial dyes. Canadian Museum of Civilization, Gatineau, Québec. Nova Scotia Museum N-25,712 # 40.

APPENDIX 2

“An Itch for 9” by Clara Clayton-Gough

S.R.B.R.L. [Sir Robert Borden J. High School, Dartmouth, Resource Library] #12

She has 9 children and she loves the equally well. All her children are the best boys and girls that you can find anywhere. Mrs. Clayton, the mother of these children, gives her children all her love and care that any mother could give.

But Mrs. Clayton had made herself, her family, and the people of Nova Scotia famous in another way. She weaves beautiful baskets. She weaves all kinds of baskets. You ask her to weave a basket for any kind of work and she will have the basket ready for you the next morning. She can make a fishing basket, or a waste basket, or hunting basket. If you want a bed for your dog or cat, or even the baby in the house, she will make one for you in no time.

Her real name was Edith Drummond. She was born in Cherry Brook on September 6, 1920. She spent her early life in Cherry Brook, a small place near Dartmouth. At the age of 18 she fell in love with a young man by the name of Clifford Clayton of East Preston. She dated the young man for two years and found him nice and smart. So she decided to marry him. They got married when she was 20 years old. After her marriage she moved to East Preston, a small village of 200 homes near Dartmouth. She has been living there since with her husband and 9 children.

Mrs. Clayton made her first basket at the age of eight. Her first basket sold for only 25 cents. She learned the art of weaving baskets from her mother. But Mrs. Clayton has improved her work very much. Her mother used to make only one kind of basket, Mrs. Clayton makes all kinds of baskets. She has made all kinds of dyes to make her baskets colourful. She uses the barks of trees and flowers to make dyes.

She uses poplar and maple tree wood to make splits for weaving baskets. Her husband, Mr. Clayton, helps her in making the splits.

Mrs. Clayton wants her art of weaving baskets to go on for years and years. She has taught her children all that she knows about making baskets. She also teaches adults in Dartmouth and Halifax schools.

Her work has won her a lot of praise. Her pictures have appeared in the newspapers. Her baskets have been shown in many exhibitions. In spite of all this, she remains a very humble lady. If you visit her at her home she will greet you with a big smile.

Like everybody else in this world, she has an itch. She says she has 9 children, so she must weave 9 baskets every day. And that is what she does – 9 baskets a day.

- A.
 - 1. What was Mrs. Clayton's first name?
 - 2. If Mrs. Clayton was born in 1920, how old is she now?
 - 3. At what age did she get married?
 - 4. From whom did she learn the art of weaving baskets?
 - 5. At what age did she make her first basket?
 - 6. Name some of the kinds of baskets she makes.
 - 7. What type of wood does she use to make baskets?
 - 8. Is Mrs. Clayton a very proud lady?
 - 9. Has Mrs. Clayton's picture appeared in the newspapers?
 - 10. What kind of itch does she have?

- B. Make a list of some other things made by people in Nova Scotia.
- C. What is an itch? Discuss in class what kinds of itches people have.

Author's note:

This unpublished piece of writing was part of an oral history project done by the students and librarian of Sir Robert Borden School in Cole Harbour. They interviewed the people who were important in their community in the mid 1970s.

APPENDIX 3

Christmas Wreaths and Garlands, A Black Tradition

People in the Black communities surrounding Halifax, Bedford and Dartmouth continue to make garlands and Christmas wreaths of natural materials. (Figure 147) They sell these at the Halifax Farmers Market, the Dartmouth Alderney Gate Market and door-to-door, along with colourful bunches of pine boughs and Canada holly (*Ilex verticillata*), known as Nova Scotia holly and “holly berries” in the Black community. Making garlands and wreaths is often a family or community affair, with people gathering to work and to enjoy a meal together afterward.



Figure 147. Christmas wreath on a door in Halifax, maker unknown, about 1980. Photo: Joleen Gordon.

Clubmoss (*Lycopodium obscurum*), known locally as evergreen or club pine, was used to make garlands and wreaths. Today, the plant is not plentiful and is protected by strict laws in some areas; its use should be discouraged. Nova Scotian wreath makers have adapted to using balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*) which is colourful and fragrant as well as plentiful in our forests.

To make a garland, select three or four 10 cm (4") pieces of fir cut from branch tips. Wrap the fir stems with a long length of string two or three times. Select three more pieces of fir and lay them slightly overlapping the wrap of the first bundle; wrap together tightly. In this way, add new bundles of fir to make one long continuous "rope" of fir. When the length of string runs out, tie on another length. At the end of the desired length, reverse the position of the last bundle of fir to cover the wrapping.

To make a Christmas wreath, select a piece of witherod (*Viburnum cassinoides*), or a coat hanger. Bend it into a circle about 20 cm (8 in) in diameter. At the overlap of the wood, thin out each of the interfacing sides to make a circle of even diameter. Tie the overlap and wrap tightly with a long length of string. Select three short 10cm (4") pieces of fir cut from branch tips. Lay one piece directly on top of the circle near the string. Lay the two other pieces on either side of the central one. Bind their stems tightly to the circle with the string. Do not make a knot. Select three more pieces of fir and lay them on the circle so that the greenery covers the first wrap, a little further along the circle. Bind again with string. Continue in this way completely covering the circle with the greenery. At the end, bend back the first bunch of fir to make the last addition. Tie off string.

The women of the Black community add colour to their wreaths in many ways. Some add sprigs of large red rosehips as they bind their wreaths. Others add a cushion of puffy white reindeer moss (*Cladonia*) behind the rosehips, giving a pleasing contrast and added texture. Another favourite addition is bunches of the pearly white everlasting flowers (*Anaphalis margaritacea*) which are either left their natural colour or dyed with commercial dyes. Women gather bunches of these flowers in late August, when they are at their best, and hang them upside down to dry. Wrapped in newspaper, they are saved for wreath making later in the fall.

GLOSSARY

Bark: the skin of a tree. There are two layers; the hard outer layer and the soft inner layer next to the wood.

Basketweave: the weaving pattern created when new elements weave consecutive warps in an over-one, under-one pattern in alternating rows.

Coiling: a method of basket making in which single or multiple elements are wrapped and sewn in concentric rings.

Creel: a basket used to hold fish, usually with a square hole in a hinged lid, through which to put fish.

Frame basket: a ribbed basket. A basket made by weaving on a framework of ribs, rather than coiled or with stake-and-strand.

Handle: the circular hoop of wood in the vertical position; also known as an overhand or transverse handle crossing from one side of the rim to the other.

Hand-hold handle: an empty space under the rim, through which a hand can be inserted to lift and carry the basket. Created by making a number of turnbacks on the rib beneath the rim.

Jackknife: a small knife with a folding blade.

Micmac, Mi'kmaq, Mi'kmaw: Our language includes many spellings of the word referring to the native Algonquians of Eastern Canada - Micmac, Mic Mac, Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaw. To quote from their recent book, *The Language of This Land, Mi'kma'ki*, by anthropologist Trudy Sable and linguist Bernie Francis (page 16):

“The word Mi'kmaq is plural and is also used when referring to the whole nation. For instance: ‘The Mi'kmaq of Eastern Canada....’ Mi'kmaw is the singular and adjectival form of Mi'kmaq. Examples: ‘I am a Mi'kmaw’ or ‘A Mi'kmaw man told me a story’ or ‘As a Mi'kmaw speaker... etc. ‘It is also used to refer to the language itself. Examples: ‘I speak Mi'kmaw.’ ‘Mi'kmaw is my first language.’ ‘All the Mi'kmaq spoke Mi'kmaw up to the 1950s....’”

Rib: a carved piece of wood, with both ends sharpened, set into the handle-rim wrap of a ribbed basket. The ribs form the framework; they are also the warp through which the splits are woven.

Ribbed basket: a basket made on a framework of two intersecting rigid hoops of wood to which ribs are added to give shape. Weaving begins at the intersections on the sides and finishes in the middle.

Rim: the circular hoop of wood in the horizontal position.

Rod: young shoot of willow or witherod.

Splint: see **Split**.

Split: a thin ribbon-like piece of wood used for weaving. This is the most common term in the Black community in Nova Scotia. Also, "**Splint**", "**Strip**", "**Weaver**". As a verb, "to separate."

Splint basket: a basket woven entirely of splints to which the rim and handle of heavier wood are added last. This style is typical of Mi'kmaw baskets.

Stake: a vertical side rod of a stake-and-strand basket.

Stake-and-strand basket: the common type of European basket, usually made of whole rods of willow, for both the vertical stakes and the horizontal weavers.

Strand: a horizontal weaving rod of a stake-and-strand basket.

Strip: see **Split**.

Turnback: the bend of a split around a rib to make a short row of weaving. Turnbacks are used to fill in areas on an asymmetrically shaped basket.

Twining: using two or more weavers at once, they cross between the ribs, so that they alternately passing in front and behind consecutive ribs.

Weaver: see **Split**. Also refers to the person weaving.

Willow: the shrub *Salix* in its many varieties. Flexible rods of several species are used to make baskets in many countries.

Withe or **Withy:** a tough flexible plant-shoot of willow or witherod.

Witherod: the shrub *Viburnum*. Flexible rods of *Viburnum cassinoides* are used to make stake-and-strand baskets. Also known as wild raisin, Indian wits and "**Withe**".

Wrap: part of the ribbed-basket bundle that holds the rim and handle hoops together. In baskets woven by Black women in Nova Scotia, the wrap is an X-shaped cross.

NOTES

History of the Ribbed Basket

1. Wright, 1983: 117-120.
2. Seed, 1927: 35-47.
3. Duschesne, 1981: 156-162.
4. Wright 1983: 25 and 117-120; Law, 1991: 67; Gabriel, 1991: 30; Butcher, 1999: 79.
5. Hogan, 2001: 289-295.
6. Wright, 1983: 25.
7. Stephenson, 1977: 30.
8. Overcast, 1976.
9. Ferguson, 1992: 41-44.
10. Etienne-Nugue, 1982; 1985; 1987; and 1990. Jocelyne Etienne-Nugue personal communication, 7 March 1998.
11. Chase, 1971.
12. Beckos, 1976; Rosengarten, 1994 and 1997.
13. Eaton, 1937; Hopf, 1965; Wigginton, 1972: 123-125; Teleki, 1975; Irwin, 1982; Daugherty, 1986: 30-76; Arnow, 1987: 16-21; and Finley, 1987.
14. John A. Burrison personal communication, 30 March 1999.

Black Basketweavers of Nova Scotia

1. Lawson, 1893; Fergusson, 1948; Winks, 1971; Grant, 1980, 1990; Malcomson, 2012; Pachai, 1987; Whitehead and Robertson, 2003; and Whitfield 2005, 2006.
2. Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax. Census of Nova Scotia, 1871. District 196. West Halifax, Ward 5, Enumerator Division No.3, Section No.2, Reel 13626, Family #294.
3. Bayly, 1827.
4. Unpublished manuscript; "A List of American Blacks on Board H.M.S. *Diomead*" in "Report of American Slaves brought in the HMS Diomed[e] [sic], Malboro', Junon, Diadem, Rifleman, Mariner from the Chesapeake landed at Halifax 2 Oct. 1813." Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax. RG 1, vol.420, doc.7, microfilm 15462, reel 2.
5. Phyllis Blakeley personal communication, 27 February 1976; Ruth Holmes Whitehead personal communication, 24 January 2006.
6. Nova Scotia Archives, Halifax. Census of Nova Scotia, 1871. District 197. East Halifax. Dartmouth Polling District, Reel 13626, Family #278.
7. Thomas, 1996: 34-37 and 52-55.
8. Elton Barratt, 1975: 7-10.
9. Unpublished manuscript; *An Itch for 9*. Clara Clayton-Gough, mid 1970s.
10. Clayton, Clifford, 1992.
11. The *Handcrafts* quarterly of the Handcrafts Instruction Continuing Education Program, Nova Scotia Department of Education, was written by Ellis Roulston, the director in 1971.
12. Tynes, 1987: 38-39.
13. Senn, 2005: 24-26.
14. Pachai and Bishop, 2006: 108.

Farmers Markets

1. Akins, 1973: 26.
2. Kilcup, 1998: 17.
3. Blakeley, 1973: 66.
4. Martin, 1957: 361.
5. Lawson, 1972: 189.
6. Nova Scotia Museum Accession Book VI, 28 September 1934.
7. Levy, *Mail-Star*, Halifax, NS. 2 June 1966: 39, 49-50 with photos.
8. Hinds, *Mail-Star*, Halifax, NS. 17 December 1968: 9.
9. Mouzar, in Kilcup, ed; 1998: 25-27.
10. Hamilton, 1982: 35.
11. Hickey, 1995: 20-21, 35-37.
12. Whitehead, 1980: 54-67; Gordon, 1990: 17-44.
13. Gordon, 2005: 26.
14. Gordon, 1977.

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1. Saunders, 1970: 78-79; Zinck, 1998: 585.

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Back Cover Image

Edith Clayton's workshop, East Preston, NS, 1987. Photo: Werner Turtschi, Hondrich, Switzerland.



Baskets of Black Nova Scotians

Joleen Gordon

This book is a history of the basketmaking tradition brought to Nova Scotia by the Black Refugees during the War of 1812. These escaping African American slaves were brought up from the Atlantic seaboard to freedom by the British Navy. The book features illustrated examples of work and construction techniques as the tradition is continued by their descendants in Nova Scotia today.

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