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BEFORE “PAPER OR PLASTIC?” THE UNIVERSAL BASKET

By Virginia Mescher

INTRODUCTION

“... Baskets. Weaving of rods into baskets is one of the most ancient of the arts amongst men; and it is practiced in almost every part of the globe, whether inhabited by civilized or savage races. Basket-making requires no description here.” (Hunt).

“Baskets are so useful, are too well known to require description . . .” (T. Webster and Mrs. Parks)

Baskets have been made, throughout the ages, by all civilizations but little was written about the process due to the fact that baskets were so common and a part of everyday life. They were found in almost every setting, were made to serve a multitude of purposes, and came in endless shapes, styles and sizes. There were utilitarian baskets for general use, laundry or clothes baskets, ironing baskets, market baskets, egg baskets, garden baskets, sewing and work baskets, cradle and wagon baskets, cheese baskets, grain baskets, storage baskets, berry and fruit baskets, potato baskets, wool-drying baskets, hampers, feather baskets, open baskets, covered baskets, fish creels, basket boats, light carriage bodies, and the list goes on.

Basket collection shown in CdV of unknown date. *Author's collection*



In the *Catalogue of Foreign and Domestic Goods* many types of basket were sold. Among those listed in the Basket and Willow Ware section were: French traveling baskets various shapes, sizes, number in nest of baskets, French cap, key, work and school baskets, ladies' and children's plain and embroidered work and reticule baskets in various shapes, sizes and patterns, knitting ball baskets, segar [cigar] baskets, nursery baskets in various sizes, knife baskets, market and clothes baskets in nests, willow carriages in assorted sizes and mounted on wheels, and willow cradles of assorted sizes and mounted on rockers.

The focus of this article will be on baskets of the mid-nineteenth century. There is not room to describe every type of basket but the major types are described. Descriptions are good but pictures are better. Many period images show baskets in the background and in order to include as many pictures of baskets as I could without taking up too much time loading the article, I isolated the basket images from the rest of the picture. The images were taken from bound copies of engravings which had been removed from publications dating from 1840 to 1861 so all of the dates could not be ascertained. Additional images of period style baskets, from the author's collection, are also included; some of the baskets are originals and others are modern reproductions of period styles.

THE BASKET MAKERS

“Basket-work is a very practical and valuable occupation in a girls’ school and in the convent. It is simple and easily learned, and is a worthwhile training, for both the hands and the eye. It is more than a pastime.” (Böke)

Some of the earliest basket makers in the United States were the Native American Indians and many early settlers learned some of their basket making skills from the Indians. The early baskets of the Shakers reflect an Indian influence. In rural areas, where basket materials were handy, most people made their own baskets, either rough ones or baskets that were artwork in themselves but all the baskets were made to be useful.



“Basket-Making” from Robert Merry’s
Museum January 1, 1851

Frequently basket-making and wickerwork was taught at orphanages, workhouses, and schools for the blind, deaf, and mute. The sales of baskets and hampers brought in income to the school as well as provided the children with a trade when they left the school. In 1845, in the New York School for the Blind, the following items were displayed at an exhibition; “a fishing basket, a chair, a nest of knife baskets, a nest of market baskets, 3 clothes baskets, 2 toy wagons, 1 foul [dirty] clothes basket, and a bandbox basket.” Most often it was the boys that were taught the trade of basket making since making the split required strength. Not that girls were completely excluded from the trade but it was more difficult for them to become trained basket makers in the industry, even though they had better manual dexterity for the smaller, more intricately made baskets.

Although a great many baskets were made at home for individual use, there were a limited number of basket manufacturers in the United States as well as it being a cottage industry. According to the 1860 United States Census, there were a total of eighty-seven companies making baskets; twenty-seven in New England states, forty-two in Middle states, fourteen in Western states, and four in Southern states. In all, 375 men and sixty-two women were employed in the basket industry. The combination of willow furniture and willow ware [baskets] was also included in the census with a total of twenty-six in the country; two in New England states, eight in Middle states, thirteen in Western states, two in Southern states, and one willow furniture maker in the Territories. The cottage industry that was devoted to baskets employed men, women and children but there were no employee figures available. A large number of baskets were imported from France, Germany, England, and Holland but no statistics were available for the number or value of imports.



Basket maker from Brighton, England. Date unknown

According to the census figures, more men were employed as commercial basket makers than women. Some basket societies would not employ women and the society would not sell to stores that employed women: their excuse was that it put men out of work. In *Employments of Women* there was a detailed discussion on basket makers. Penny indicated that a basket maker needed strength but skill and practice were just as important and five dollars could purchase the necessary tools which would last a lifetime. Younger people were apprenticed to an experienced basket maker for a period of seven years in order to learn the trade; there were also books which gave instructions on making the baskets and how to proportion them but nothing replaced the skill learned as an apprentice. The income differed according to the type of basket made and most workers were paid by the piece. Basket makers could usually earn a dollar a day but people who were just learning basket making were paid two dollars a week for about a year while they gained skill. In some cases, baskets were made as an assembly line process and could take as many as five people working on one basket, with each one worker doing a specific job.

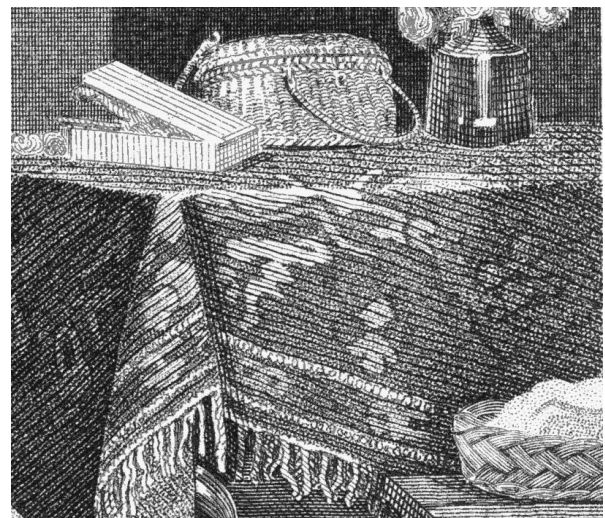
Basket making was considered a lower grade of a manual trade and a great many immigrant families were employed by the basket industry and also engaged in the cottage industry; sometimes entire families would be engaged in making baskets in order to support themselves. Mrs. Penny described several such basket makers. One German widow, living in New York, managed to support herself and her family on the baskets she made. She purchased, at seven cents per pound, the willow ready for use and sold the small, covered baskets for a price of two dollars and twenty-five cents per dozen. Another German women made fancier, molded baskets and made one dollar per day. Another woman dyed the willow and her baskets sold for one dollar and fifty cents.

THE BASKETS

There were several types of baskets, each one having many styles and shapes. Utilitarian baskets were made in different styles of woven and coiled baskets. Woven baskets were just that — woven of various materials including osier or willow, rattan (sometimes spelled ratan), barks, twigs, or splints (or splits) of several woods. Coiled or spiral baskets were made with grasses, palm, rushes, sweetgrass, pine needles, or straw. Finally, novelty baskets were made from a multitude of styles and materials.

WOVEN BASKETS

Most of the period basket images were of woven baskets — some roughly done and others were very fine work; some were open and others had lids. The uses were as varied as the styles and most were free formed baskets and most were made either of willow, rattan, or splints. Woven baskets, either free form or molded, came in limitless styles, used a variety of materials, and had a multitude of purposes.



Basket box (left), covered basket with two handles, (upper center) and rattan basket (lower right)
Godey's November, 10, 1841

Some of the most recognizable woven baskets were formed on molds and were generally associated with New England or the Shakers; two common types were Nantucket Lightship and Shaker baskets. The makers of these baskets were probably not included in the figures for the commercial basket making industry since these baskets were mostly done as a cottage industry.

Nantucket Lightship Baskets

A basket that would have been associated with the New England area and probably would not have been seen in many other areas is the Nantucket Lightship basket. All of the Nantucket Lightship baskets were not made on the lightships but the name seems to be common for that particular style of baskets. The shape appears to be influenced by New Hampshire baskets; both had turned wooden bottoms but the New Hampshire baskets were made with oak splints and had a riveted bail handle rather than a swing handle and the Nantucket baskets were usually made of rattan. This type of basket seems to have been more generally associated with the lightships but they were also made off-island (away from Nantucket Island) and elsewhere in New England. Today, the most expensive ones are still made on the island but less expensive ones are made elsewhere and many come from Asia. These baskets became less popular during the Depression of the 1930s but the style was revived by José Reyes, an off-islander, in the 1940s and originally called his baskets “friendship” baskets. He also developed the covered oval purse style in 1948.

The first lightships were stationed off Nantucket Island as early as 1819 and were used to warn incoming ships of the dangerous shoals off Nantucket Island. Although lightships were used prior to 1854, that is when the first one was actually commissioned and the service ended in 1905 when the ships were replaced by buoys. The men had an eight-month duty and each day was divided into two watches; the work was difficult but the crew did have some free time. To make the time pass more quickly and for to make extra money, members of the crew often did handiwork or made baskets. During their four-month stay on land, the crew would prepare the raw materials such as the rattan and the turned wooden bottoms and while they were on the ship, they would assemble the baskets. The mechanical process of assembling the baskets was called “scrimshawing”(not to be confused with scrimshaw or the art of incising designs on ivory, bones of a whale or other sea mammals).



Modern molded Nantucket style baskets (both round and oval) swing handle attached with rivets. *Author's collection*

Baskets, made by the sailors, were molded over wooden shapes; in 1856 the first mold that was brought on board a lightship was recorded. This style of molded basket was woven with flat strips of rattan inserted into the side of a turned wooden bottom and it was shaped over a mold or blocks as the weaving continued. The mold enabled the basket maker to produce baskets that were a consistent shape and size. After the assembly was complete, the baskets were shellacked, which gave them their distinctive sheen, and also made the baskets more durable. They were usually either round or oval in shape and ranged in sizes from a pint to a peck and a half and were sold individually or in sets of five or eight.

Shaker Baskets

Shaker baskets would have been more commonly seen since there were Shaker communities in New England, Kentucky, and other areas and they also sold their wares areas away from their communities. Like the Nantucket baskets, majority of Shaker baskets were also woven over a mold but were made with ash splits rather than rattan and had a woven bottom rather than wooden ones. Although a mold was used to standardize the basket size and shape, the type of weave used could vary which produced an endless variety of baskets. Some baskets, using poplar cloth, palm leaves, or straw were woven over the same molds but produced a different look. The cat-head or kitten-head baskets, with pointed bottom corners, which resemble cats' ears, are typical Shaker shapes as are the round woven bottom basket, sieves, rectangular baskets and cheese baskets, with their hexagonal-weave bottom. All these styles were woven in various sizes.



Two types of modern cat's head Shaker baskets — basket (left) with side handles, shows the weave on the bottom and the basket (right) shows the points that project at each corner. *Author's collection*

The Shakers probably learned basic basket-making from the local Algonquin Indians but added their own unique combination of art and utility to produce baskets of uncommon beauty. Basket-making was primarily associated with northeastern Shaker villages but Mt. Lebanon, New York was probably responsible for most of the Shaker basket sales in the nineteenth century. Between 1801 and the end of the nineteenth century, the community made more than seventy thousand baskets which were sold all over the United States. The basket sales were mostly for “fancy baskets” rather than larger utility baskets, which were mostly used within the communities. The term “fancy” did not refer to just decorative or frivolous baskets; it indicated that the baskets were of superior quality and extremely well made. Wetherbee mentioned in her book that there were more than twenty styles of baskets recorded in a Shaker ledger written between 1855 and 1875.

Shaker baskets were a collaborative effort of both the brothers and sisters; the brothers made the molds, splints, handles and rims and the sisters wove the baskets that were used within the community and sold to the locals and outside the communities. The Shakers embraced new technology in making their baskets. At first the brothers made the splints by hand planing the larger piece of wood with a draw knife but by 1816 they began to pound the ash logs into splints using a water-powered triphammer. The splints were then planed to a standard thickness. The narrower more delicate splints, used as the weavers for the finer baskets, were made by running the wider splints through a splitter.



Two modern baskets using narrow splits typical of Shaker made baskets. A Shaker-style market basket (left) and a “kicked-in” bottom style (right) *Authors collection.*

Miscellaneous Basket Woven Styles

Molded baskets were not the only woven baskets produced. Baskets were made of plain splints of ash, oak, hickory, rattan, palmetto, palm fronds and willow wands and homemade baskets were made from available materials at hand. Some familiar shapes were the rectangular market baskets, a dual lobed basket which was called an egg basket or buttock basket, melon, berry and potato baskets, large utilitarian ones such as laundry or wash baskets, storage, and field baskets. Wool drying baskets had wooden legs and an open work bottom so that the washed wool could drain and have air circulation underneath the basket. Feather baskets had a lid that slid up and down on the handle but could not be removed.



Modern two-lobed basket, also called an egg basket.

Variations in the weaves differed according to the basket style and material used; the work could be an open design or a closely woven one, depending on the purpose of the basket and the splints also would differ in width and style which affected the look of the basket. Basket makers enjoyed variations not only in weave but sometimes dyed splints were included to vary the overall look of the basket.

COILED BASKETS

The coiling of bundled grasses, tree fronds, fine stems, tree needles or straw has been practiced by Native Americans since around 7000 B. C. The fine materials were bundled or twined together, in a bundle which was secured by thread or string. The bundle was then coiled into a shape or woven through wheel spoke-like supports. These baskets were made in numerous shapes, sizes and designs and served many purposes from storage to small gems of art work. Some baskets were watertight and could be used for storing or transporting liquids. One can still find these types of baskets in areas where Native Americans ply their traditional crafts.



baskets, used for grain, cotton, or fish from a marsh grass called bulrushes. Women made the smaller baskets with a softer grass called sweetgrass. These baskets are still made in the Low Country of South Carolina.

A well-known type of coiled basket is the sweetgrass baskets of South Carolina which were introduced in the United States 300 years ago when the craft was brought to America by West African slaves. The baskets were used as collection and storage baskets and another common use was for sweetgrass basket was winnowing rice; this basket was called a rice basket or fanner. Men made the larger storage

Roughly made grapevine, woven rattan, and sweet grass coiled baskets *Author's collection*

PRICES OF BASKETS

Advertisements for prices of baskets were difficult to locate. Thanks to Stephen Osman, who shared what he found in the National Archives. Mr. Williams, the manufacturer of baskets was trying to sell his baskets to the War Department and Mr. Osman found his brochure in a file.

OAK AND RATTAN BASKETS.

Corn, Clothes, Laundry, Rice, Cotton and Fruit Baskets.

MANUFACTURED BY
L. B. WILLIAMS,
HUNTINGTON, MASS.

PRICE LIST.

SPENT		BATTAN.	
	PER DOZEN.		PER DOZEN.
Pouch, board bottom	\$1.50	1 1/4 Bushel	\$2.50
Do. " " " " " "	1.00	1 1/2 Bushel	3.00
1 1/4 Bushel	2.00	3 Bushel	5.50
1 1/2 Bushel	2.50	4 Bushel	7.00
2 1/4 Bushel	3.50	1 1/4 Bushel	5.00
1 Bushel	3.00	1 1/2 Bushel	5.50
1 1/4 Bushel	4.00	2 Bushel	7.00
1 1/2 Bushel	4.50	3 Bushel	12.00
2 1/4 Bushel	5.50	4 Bushel	14.00
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Particular attention paid to orders for all styles of Baskets used by Manufacturers.



Slave Peach with Cover



Volunt. Henschel, 1844, p. 11.



Half Bush Soling



Splint Clothes / Houston, Texas



Rattan Clothes (Boston, St. L.)



Splint Clothes oblong 4 in nest



Battan Clothex oblonga 4 in. long



*Splint Market 3 in nest
and Splint laundry*



Rattan Market 3 in 1990

NOVELTY, FANCY FAIR, OR WORK BASKETS

Numerous instructions for these baskets were found magazines such as in *Godey's*, *Peterson's*, *Arthur's* and *The Ladies' Home Magazine* as well as in girl's activity books. Some of the materials used were mosses pasted on pasteboard, alum crystals which covered an small existing wire or willow basket, baskets of allspice, cloves, rice, beads, or shells, colored feathers, straw, millet, lavender stems, card paper [similar to modern cardstock] covered with quilled [narrow paper strips tightly rolled] paper, and baskets made of woven paper strips or ones of cardboard covered with wafers [circles of gilt or colored paper glued on the base basket]. Instructions for work-baskets, made of fabric covered pasteboard or wire frames were also found as were ones which were knitted or crocheted. Since these instructions for these baskets were numerous and were more of a novelty item of fancy-work rather than an utilitarian basket, they will not be detailed here.

THE BASKET MAKING PROCESS

Very few primary sources describe the basket making process but I did find one post- Civil War primary source which detailed the construction process of willow and split baskets. While it did not describe using a mold, the weaving processes were similar.

The American Cyclopaedia included the following general description of a woven basket.

"In making baskets, the twigs or rods, being assorted according to their size and use, and being left considerably longer than the work to be woven, are arranged on the floor in pairs parallel to each other and at small intervals apart, and in the

direction of the longer diameter of the basket. Then two large rods are laid across the parallel ones, with their thick ends toward the workman who is to put his foot on them, thereby holding them firm, and weave them one at a time alternately over and under those first laid down, confining them in their places. This forms the foundation of the basket, and is technically called the slate or slate. Then the long end of one of these two rods is woven over and under the pairs of short ends, and all around the bottom, till the whole is woven in. The same is done with the other rod, and then additional long ones are woven in, till the bottom of the basket is of sufficient size. The sides are formed by sharpening the large ends of enough stout rods to form the ribs, and plaiting or forcing the sharpened ends into the bottom of the basket, from the circumference toward the centre; then raising the rods in the direction the sides of the basket are to have, and weaving other rods between them till the basket of the required depth. The brim is formed by bending down and fastening the perpendicular sides of the ribs, whereby the whole is firmly and compactly united. A handle is fitted to the basket by forcing two or three sharpened rods of the right length down the weaving of the sides, close to each other, pinning them fast about two inches below the brim, so that the handle may retain its position when completed. The ends of the rods are then bound or plaited in any way the workman chooses. This is a basket of the rudest kind. Others will vary according to artist's purpose, skill and materials. When whole rods or twigs are not adapted to the kind of work required, they are divided into splits or skeins. Splits are made by cleaving the rod lengthwise into four parts, by means of an implement consisting of two blades, crossing each other at right angles, the intersection of which passes down the pith of the rod. These splits are next drawn through an implement resembling a common spoke-shave, keeping the pith presented to the edge of the iron, and the back of the split against the wood of the implement. The split is then passed through another implement called an upright, to bring it to a more uniform shape. This consists of a flat piece of steel, each end of which has a cutting edge, like that of an ordinary chisel; this piece is bent round, and the edges are made to approach each other as near as desired by means of screws, the whole being fixed into a handle. By passing the splits between these two edges, they are reduced to any required thickness. The implements required in basket making are few and simple, consisting, besides of those just mentioned, of knives, bodkins, and drills for boring, leads for steadying the work while in progress, and when it is of small dimensions and a piece of iron called a beater. — The splints of various kinds of wood, particularly certain a species of ash, elm, and birch, are extensively employed in basket work. These splints are obtained by beating logs of the wood with a maul, thus loosening and separating the different layers or rings into narrow strips. This is the simple and primitive process, and is necessarily slow, and restricted to woods of a free texture. Several machines have been invented and are now employed for the manufacture of splints, by which different kinds of wood, prepared by steaming or otherwise, are cut or rived into the required form. Basket willow or osier are the terms commonly applied to the species of *salix* most used in basket work."

The weaving process for baskets made over a mold such as the Nantucket and Shaker baskets, was very similar to the description above, with the exception that the weaver used a wooden mold as a base which allowed for consistency in size and shape of the basket. The Shakers had a multitude of different molds for various shapes and sizes of baskets but that did not mean that all their baskets were alike. The weaver could vary her design and an entirely new basket would emerge from the mold when she was finished.

USE AND CARE OF BASKETS

Primary source material occasionally listed baskets as necessary household equipment which sometimes included the proper care of baskets. In *Miss Leslie's Lady's House Book*, the author had a section on suggested basket-ware needed for a household but no further description or illustrations were included.

“BASKET-WARE — There should be a large market basket and a smaller one, and these should be kept very clean, wiping them always after using, and frequently washing them out with a wet cloth, and then putting them to dry. They will require occasionally scrubbing with a hand-brush, soap, and warm water, to get off the grease that the marketing will leave in them. Fish should be carried home from market in the hand, and not laid in the basket, or they will communicate a taste and smell to the other provisions. If you use a basket for keeping bread, let it be one with a cover, and see that the bread when put away in it, is always closely wrapped in a clean thick towel.

Small hand-baskets are useful for eggs, and may other articles.

It is well to have a bottle-basket with sockets, so that bottles may be carried in it standing upright, and without any danger of breaking.

Demijohns (large bottles covered with basket-work) are extremely useful in a kitchen or store-room, for holding vinegar, molasses, &c.; being less liable to accidents, than earthen, or even stone jugs. Small demijohns, holding from a gallon to two gallons, are very convenient.

For laundry-work you should have one or more large clothes-baskets, which should not be used for any other purpose. A basket with a lid or cover is useful for small muslins, &c., after they are ironed, to preserve them from injury by dust or damp.

An old champagne basket, kept in the kitchen closet, will be found a good receptacle for dusters and sundry other things.”

Catherine Beecher mentioned in her book that “Baskets of all sizes, for eggs, fruit, marketing, clothes, etc.; also chip-baskets. When often used, they should be washed in hot suds.”

Miss Beecher's advice is a bit different than those recommended today. For basket collectors who have more baskets than they can regularly use or have original baskets that should not be used, there are some “care and feeding” rules. First of all, if your basket or baskets are very old and extremely valuable you may wish to contact a trained conservationist for cleaning advice. Most collectors of modern baskets can observe the following rules. Dust regularly; keep them out of direct sunlight, and keep the baskets away for direct contact with heating vents. In modern homes there seems to be no way to prevent gradual dust build-up and some drying of the splits. To counteract this problem, according to Michael Vyskcoil, you can take the baskets outside and mist them with a garden hose but NEVER SOAK THE BASKET OR IMMERSE IT IN WATER. Next brush them with a mixture of 1/4 cup Murphy's Oil Soap to one gallon of water. Completely rinse the soap mixture from the baskets again using the garden hose but don't immerse or soak the baskets in water. Dry the baskets outside on a clear day but don't dry in direct sunlight. After they are completely dry, you can now bring them back inside for use or display.

BASKETS AND LIVING HISTORY

Although baskets were universal, the styles were not. Since some baskets are regional, i.e., Nantucket or Shaker baskets, so consider the location of your persona or impression. There is also a time and place where baskets are suitable; they are handy to carry items at living history events but keep in mind the appropriateness of the basket for what you are doing. A finely dressed lady, with the intention of going visiting, would probably not be carrying a large market basket and conversely a poorer woman, from the south, going to market would probably not be carrying a delicately made Nantucket basket. The use of a Nantucket basket could be explained, for an upper class woman, by indicating that she had taken a summer vacation at the shore in New England. Shaker baskets were available for purchase in areas outside Shaker communities but consider the income level of your character. Would he or she have the money to purchase such a basket? If you are shopping, a market basket would be appropriate or if you are transporting handwork, a work basket would be best. If you doing a rural impression consider using a homemade, free-form basket rather than a molded one; the quality of the basket could range from fine to rough, depending upon the skill of the basket maker. Coiled baskets would probably not have been as common in areas away from Native American populations or the Low Country of South Carolina unless one had been touring in those areas.

To achieve a more accurate impression, a basket should not be used as a matter of course for carrying all the “stuff” one tends to have at an event. Please don’t use a basket, covered with a tea towel as a modern “carry-all” for your lunch, water, camera, wallet, and etc. It could be used as a transport to get things from here to there but not as a handbag substitute. Consider carrying less “stuff” with you, use a dress pocket (a deep one holds almost anything a women would need to carry) or find someplace to store your extra items such as lunch, water and purchases.

Look in the background of period photographs engravings, and genre paintings and you will be surprised at how many different baskets you will see. Those will give you plenty of ideas for what to look for when searching out a modern basket, as I would not suggest using an antique basket for everyday use at an event. As shown in the photographs of modern baskets, it is fairly easy to obtain a basket that is appropriate for most living history situations.

Below are a series of illustrations of baskets from period engravings. Just take the time to look behind the foreground and find the gems.

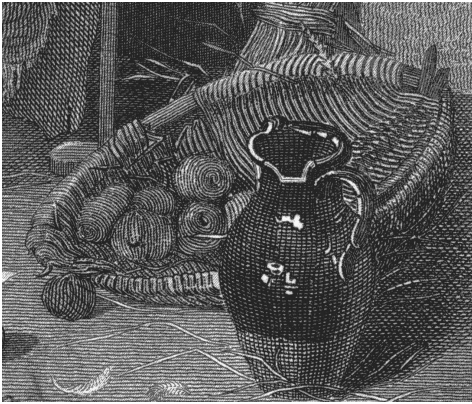
BASKET IMAGES FROM PERIOD PUBLICATIONS



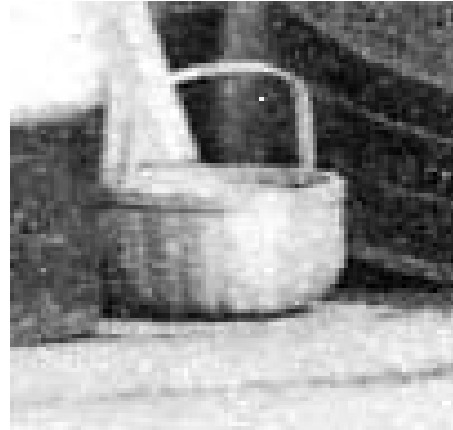
Workbasket *Godey's* November 1844



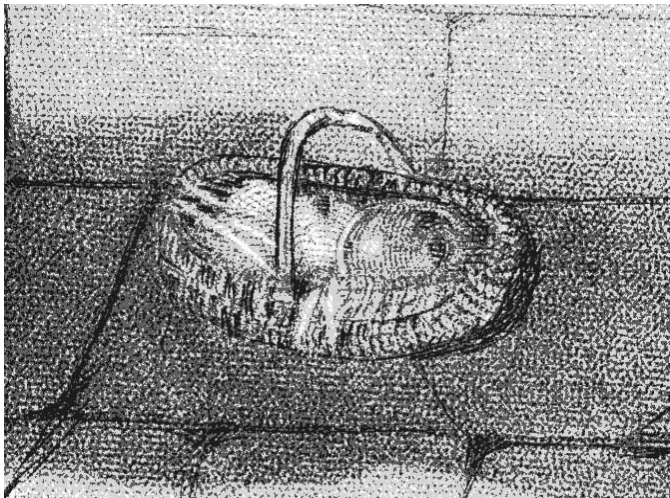
Covered willow basket *Godey's* June 1851



Roughly made utility basket *Peterson's* October 1856

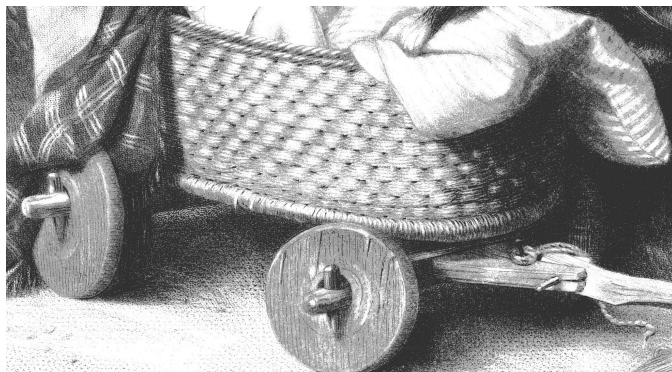


Basket from image of store front circa 1860s



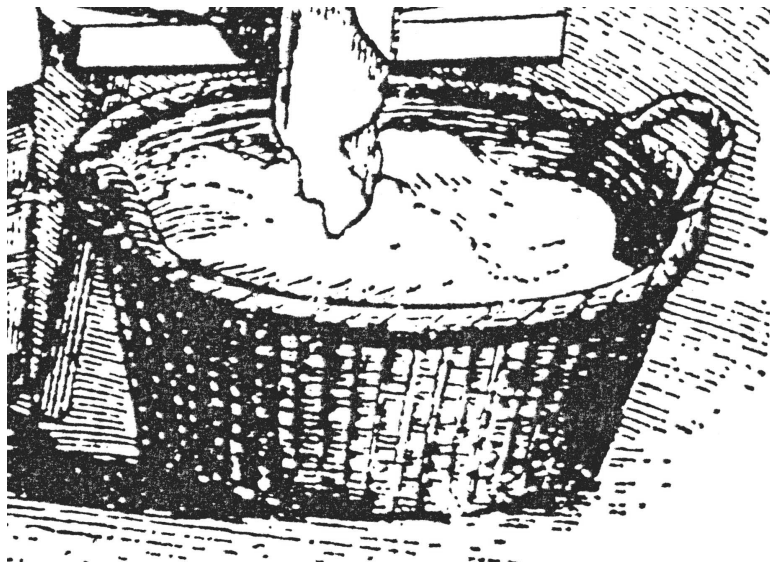
Small willow basket *Godey's* December 1852

Woven splint basket cart circa 1840-1865





Baskets upper left and lower right corners used on a picnic *Godey's*



Willow laundry basket from and 1850s advertisement

GLOSSARY OF BASKET MAKING MATERIALS AND TERMS

Many terms used in basketry are unfamiliar or have various meanings so I included a glossary for the convenience of the reader.

Black or brown ash and also basket ash tree, hoop ash- [*Fraxinus nigra*]. This wood was commonly used by the Shakers for their baskets. It is found in wet areas as well as hardwood forests and range from Canada to West Virginia and as far west as Iowa. Black ash has the ability to flex and does not break, split, snag or splinter as some other woods will.

Buttocks baskets - Also called an egg basket. It is made with two lobes formed by a cinched middle. This design distributed the weight of the load so that the contents are not broken or bruised and the basket bottom would not break.

Cat head basket - Typical Shaker basket. The bottom has points on each corner that resemble cat's ears. They came in many sizes and the smaller ones were known as kitten head baskets.

Checker weave - A plain over and under weave.

Cheese weave - A distinctive octagonal weave used in making cheese or curd baskets. The large holes allowed the whey to drain before being pressing. It was also used in other baskets for decorative and utilitarian purposes.

Chip - Wood that is split into very fine strands. It is used for baskets, bonnets, and fans.

Cottage industry - A family group that manufactured a product at home. They either sold the product themselves (lace makers) or sold to a larger manufacture who supplied them with the raw materials (pieceworkers such as shirt makers). Basket makers could be in either group.

Kicked-in bottom - The inside center of the basket is elevated from the rest of the bottom which distributes the weight of the contents around the basket bottom rather than the weight settling in the center of the bottom and causing a weakness in the basket.

Mold - Wooden shapes on which some woven baskets were made. By using a mold, the basket shape and size can be standardized. Nantucket and Shaker baskets are two types of molded baskets.

Open work - A loosely woven basket. It is usually a checker weave and the open areas allow dirt, sand, or water fall through the bottom.

Osier - "A species of willow or water willow, or the twig of a willow, used in making baskets." (Webster) A species of willow preferred for basket making. It was cultivated in Germany, France and Belgium and exported to the United States. In all there were more than sixty varieties of willows grown for basket making. The velvet or true osier [*Salix viminalis*] was considered the best for basket making but other species were used such as the red willow [*Salix rubra*], Forby's Willow or fine basket osier [*Salix Forbyanna*]. In 1851, the United States Patent Office reported that more than five million dollars worth of osier was imported into the United States and the prices ranged from one dollar to one dollar thirty cents per ton; it could be purchased by basket makers at seven cents a pound. There were a number of articles published on how to grow osier in the United States as a crop thus hopefully reducing the need for importation of

willow and reducing the cost.

Poplar cloth - Poplar wood was too brittle to use in the usual manner of splints for baskets. The process, developed by the Shakers prior to the Civil War, required to make the splints was laborious but it was a way to use an otherwise useless wood. Thin splints of poplar wood, prepared by the brothers, were woven into a paper-like cloth by the sisters. This poplar cloth was cut and glued to pasteboard shapes to make fancy boxes that resembled small baskets or could be shaped over basket molds.

Rattan or Ratan - "The name applied to stems, the growth of India, and the produce of various species of the genus *Calamus*, most or all of which are perennial, simple or unbranched, cylindrical, jointed, very tough and strong, from the size of a goose-quill to the size of a human wrist, and from fifty to a hundred feet in length. They are used for wickerwork, seats of chairs, walking sticks, withes and thongs, ropes, cables, &c." (Webster) *Palembang*, was the variety used for baskets and was tan to light brown in color. Other varieties were used for furniture, chair bottoms, walking sticks, and umbrella handles. For baskets, the outer portion of the stem was shaved into flat strips and then could be striped into various widths. Nantucket baskets were commonly made of shaved rattan strips. The round core was known as "centre cane" in England and in the United States, it is known as "reed" and was sometimes substituted for osier. For this reason, willow/wicker and rattan may sometimes be confused, especially in modern baskets.

Slide lid - Sometimes called a "feather basket." The lid is permanently attached to the basket and slides up and down on the handle. This design secures the lid and keeps small or light items, such as feathers, in the basket.

Splints or splits - Flat strips of wood made from oak, elm, ash, and hickory. The wood was cut into a squared shape and beaten, either by hand or machine, until the wood split at the growth rings. Thinner splints may be made from the thick ones by splitting the layers the layers with a drawknife. The thicker splints are used for the base and sides. Some splints were dyed for added variety.

Sweetgrass - [*Muhlenbergia filipes*] It is a winter hardy perennial grass that grows in moist soil. It ranges from Alaska to South Carolina and is also found in Europe. When dried, the leaves have a sweet, vanilla-like scent. It is used to make traditional baskets found in the Low Country of South Carolina.

Twined work - This weave consisted of stiff rigid splints or stems, called staves, and the woof was made by braiding pairs or three stems into a larger single strand. As the woof was passed through the staves, it was twisted and resulted in an unique weave.

Twill weave - A simple weave of under two, over two under two. This produces a diagonal pattern.

Weavers - These are a much thinner and narrower splints used for the weaving in and out of the foundation splints.

White Oak - [*Quercus alba*] Split baskets of the Appalachian mountains are typically made of white oak. Oak is very strong and rigid but can splinter or break.

Wicker-work or willow-work - Baskets made with willow stems, twigs or rods. The weave has a distinctive pattern but many variations exist and this weave can be combined with twill work to produce even more variations. Strong baskets, furniture, and light carriages were made from

willow. While most willow-work was imported, the industry seemed to have begun in the United States by 1825 but by the 1850s, it had blossomed into a small industry. Needless to say, there was more of reason to find a local source of willow rather than depending upon imported willow.

Willow - A number of species of willow were used in basket making. Although in the nineteenth century, most willow [*Salix viminalis*] was imported into the United States, it was found that some native species could be cultivated in this country to be used in basket making. The purple willow [*Salix purpurea*], the long-leaf willow [*Salix triandra*], and Huntington willow [*Salix caprea*] were three species grown in the United States for basket making.

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