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The Loving of the Game: A Study of Basketry in the Mammoth Cave Area

Denis O. Kiely

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THE LOVING OF THE GAME:
A STUDY OF BASKETRY IN THE MAMMOTH CAVE AREA

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of the Department of
Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Denis O. Kiely
December, 1983
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THE LOVING OF THE GAME:

A STUDY OF BASKETRY IN THE MAMMOTH CAVE AREA

Recommended  September 1, 1983
(Date)

Director of Thesis

Approved  December 1, 1983
(Date)

Dean of the Graduate College
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There is a saying that almost nothing is ever accomplished through individual effort alone. That is certainly the case with this project and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the various people who have provided their assistance.

My thesis committee, Jay Anderson, Burt Feintuch, and Carl Kell were of great assistance. They each provided suggestions and comments that have been incorporated into this thesis.

My fellow students in Dr. Montell's Folk Art and Technology class willingly shared their interviews and their thoughts. I would especially like to thank Michael Korn, James Brown, and Elizabeth Harzoff who shared their ideas and provided a great deal of encouragement.

Dr. Lynwood Montell provided a semester project that has occupied my attention for six years now. I would like to express my thanks for his interest in my early ideas for this project.

All things have a beginning and my involvement in folklore is no exception. I would like to thank John Vlach who refused to accept second class work from me as an undergraduate and who encouraged me on to graduate work.

To all the people of the Mammoth Cave area who took time out to talk to a bunch of mostly Yankee graduate students, my thanks. I hope I got it partly right.

To Dana Girard, who did the illustrations and so much more, my eternal thanks.

To the Taylors and the Fairweathers, thanks for the emotional support and the loan of equipment.

And finally, to Bret, who taught me so much and whom I will always miss.
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THE LOVING OF THE GAME:
A STUDY OF BASKETRY IN THE MAMMOTH CAVE AREA
Denis O. Kiely August, 1983 104 pages
Directed by: Jay Anderson, Burt Feintuch, and Carl Kell
Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies
Western Kentucky University

The production and marketing of baskets in the Mammoth Cave area of Kentucky from 1880 to the present is observed in light of the cultural, technical, aesthetic, and traditional aspects involved. The process of making a white oak ribbed basket is documented, as well as the technical and aesthetic variables from which the basket maker renders his product. The changing role of social organization and communication in the production and marketing of a traditional craft objects is also considered.
CHAPTER I

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

On September 1, 1977, Mr. Walter D. Logsdon gave a classroom demonstration on basket making for Dr. Lynwood Montell's Folk Art and Technology class. At almost eighty-five years of age, Mr. Logsdon proved to be a marvelous demonstrator with an incredible feel for his craft and a quick and ready wit. While showing the materials and techniques used in constructing white oak baskets, he also provided the class with a wealth of information concerning the history and life-style of the residents in the community where he grew to manhood. Mr. Logsdon began his demonstration with the following comments:

I was born and reared in a community now known as Cub Run, Hart County, Kentucky. In that immediate community, the way of life for most people was the art of basket making. So far as I know, the industry was going on in Hart County and surrounding areas, Grayson County and Edmonson, for a good many years before my memory. So it goes back a long way. But some of my earliest memories was watching my father, who had passed away, sit and make baskets to provide food for his children. It was a way of life.¹

That demonstration served as an introduction to a semester fieldwork project. The purpose of that project was

¹Walter D. Logsdon, interviewed by Lynwood Montell Bowling Green, Kentucky, 1 September 1977.
to talk with and interview people from the Mammoth Cave area who made baskets or remembered individuals connected with the basket industry that were no longer living. That class project produced a wealth of information concerning the basketry trade in the Mammoth Cave area. As a member of that class, I began a semester project that has now lasted, with some interruptions, for almost six years.

Today, a relative handful of individuals continue to make and market handmade white oak ribbed baskets in the Mammoth Cave area using traditional techniques that have been practiced for well over four generations. The white oak ribbed or bow basket is a regional type of traditional basketry. Individuals and communities throughout the Southern Highlands, from Virginia to the Ozark Mountains, have practiced these traditional techniques for several hundred years. While basket makers from the Southern Highlands have shared similar techniques and tools to produce similar type baskets, within the region there has arisen a variety of stylistic differences much like the folk narrative that has numerous variants over a geographic area of distribution. The baskets produced in the Mammoth Cave area, while of the type of white oak basketry produced in the Southern Highlands, exhibit elements of style that differentiate them from other baskets of similar type.

The purpose of this thesis will be to discuss the cultural, technical, aesthetic, and traditional aspects involved in
the production and marketing of white oak baskets in the Mammoth Cave area of Kentucky from 1880 to the present. While the process of making a white oak basket will be documented, as well as the technical and aesthetic variables from which the basket maker renders his product, this study will also explore the changing role of social organization and communication in the production and marketing of a traditional handmade object.

As a traditional hand process that has never been mechanized, basket making continues as a process that has altered only slightly from what it was several hundred years ago. While methods, techniques, and (to a limited extent) style have altered very little, social organization, marketing, audience, and the perceptive view of the object on the part of the artist have altered greatly. By focusing on the community, social organization within the community, and the levels of communication relating to basket making over a prolonged period of time, this writer will investigate how, by what methods, and for what reasons this type and style of basket continues to endure.

In Howard W. Marshall's "Mr. Westfall's Baskets: Traditional Craftsmanship in Northcentral Missouri," a single basket maker is studied in terms of his technical approaches to his craft. This basket maker uses similar techniques and produces a similar type basket as those produced in the Mammoth Cave area of Kentucky. Although Marshall describes with
marvelous detail the procedures and techniques Mr. Westfall uses in making his baskets, he perpetuates the conception of the folk artist or craftsman as an isolated individual on the verge of extinction. While in a large sense this may be true, it cannot be ignored that many traditional craftpeople function within a larger community setting than just producer and consumer. The basket making community of Wax-Cub Run is an excellent point in case. For almost seventy years, a significant proportion of the population in the Mammoth Cave area was involved to some degree with the making or marketing of handmade white oak baskets. Beginning around 1880, a large scale basket making industry evolved that affected many area residents. Many were involved in the actual construction of baskets, local merchants accepted baskets in trade for store goods, and others participated in numerous operations to peddle baskets over short and long distance trading routes. Later, during the 1920s, other marketing techniques were developed such as roadside stands, parcel post sales, and long distance delivery by truck. This last method was utilized as late as 1975.

The concept of marketing traditional craft objects has also been utilized by other communities such as the Jugtown potters of northern Georgia and the basket makers of

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of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina. Thus, the marketing activities of the Wax-Cub Run community are not an isolated example. In fact, community involvement in the marketing of traditional craft objects is a much older and more widely spread phenomenon that commonly stated in American folklife scholarship.

Marketing activities, while primarily an economic consideration, have also had an effect on the craft object itself. The basket makers of the Mammoth Cave area still continue to make the traditional ribbed basket, but the demands of a wider audience have resulted in the development of new forms and decorative elements. Marketing activities, by providing a larger demand for baskets, have permitted more individuals to become involved in the production and in the marketing process. These activities produced a social organization within the community that has fostered numerous adaptations in the basketry process in response to changes in the social environment.

Material culture studies on basketry have utilized either a folk atlas approach or have concentrated on a single individual crafts person. While both type of studies are effective, they have no methodology to investigate social

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organization and its relationship to basket making. This writer will utilize a social systems approach to investigate and describe that relationship in the Mammoth Cave area.

The social systems model is an outgrowth of general systems theory and is based upon the assumption that individuals, small groups, families, and other complex human organizations (such as neighborhoods and communities) can all be regarded as systems, with certain common properties. A social system then is a set of interrelated activities that together constitute a single entity. The smallest unit of that system is the behavior of the individual person. The acts of persons tend to cluster into patterns, and the social system is constructed out of these patterns.¹

The basket making and marketing activities of the residents of the Mammoth Cave area can be viewed as a social system. In this thesis, those activities will be described as a social system with three significant levels. The first level is that of the basket community as a whole and the adaptations and changes the community has made to economics and various outside influences. Social control, socialization, and differentiation within the community will also be considered as part of the first level of the social system. The family will be presented as the second level of the basketry social system. The family will be considered as a

focal system with special significance for the basketry activities of the Mammoth Cave area. Methods of organization, social control, and socialization within the family system will be discussed at length. The third level will be the individual person and the different functions that basket making has played in the lives of many area residents. Intrapersonal and interpersonal communication will also be presented as an important part of the basketry process today.

There are other important elements that will also be discussed during the course of this thesis. For example, the historical and cultural context in which basketry exists in the Mammoth Cave area is important in understanding its beginnings and its longevity. The actual techniques and various aesthetic considerations involved in the construction of a white oak ribbed basket will also be presented. Finally, there is a narrative aspect of basketry culture in the Mammoth Cave area that will be briefly considered.

Methodology: Fieldwork and Analysis

The data used in this project were gathered between September 1977 and March 1983. It consists of photographs and tape recorded interviews with twenty informants who had personal or familial ties with basket making in the Mammoth Cave area. These interviews were conducted by this writer, students, and faculty members from Western Kentucky University. Eight interviews were conducted by students from Western Kentucky University between 1965 and 1976. The ma-
The majority of interviews utilized in this project was conducted during the fall of 1977 by students in Dr. Lynwood Montell's Folk Art and Technology class as part of a semester project. I also conducted additional interviews with some of the informants previously contacted during the spring and summer months of 1980. Mr. George Childress of Park City, Kentucky, was most helpful in allowing me to photograph the actual basket making process during several interview sessions.

Copies of the tapes recorded during my fieldwork and those conducted by members of the Folk Art and Technology class are on deposit in the Folklore, Folklife, and Oral History Archive at Western Kentucky University.

My knowledge of basketry at the onset of this project was virtually non-existent. In order to document and understand the historical background and the process of making a basket, I felt that it was necessary to obtain additional background information. I accomplished this through reading various basketry articles and books. Comparative information was also obtained by interviews with basket makers from other areas of the country. Mr. Michael Johnson of Mackinac, Michigan, provided information concerning the making of black ash baskets. Mr. Thomas Lynch and Mrs. Margaret J. Murphy of Short Mountain, Tennessee, near McMinnville, Tennessee, supplied information about the basket making activities of the Short Mountain community around the turn of the century.

During my interviews with various members of the bas-
ket making community, I began to realize the importance of the marketing activities that many members of the community had been involved in. I also became more and more interested in the complex role that the family seemed to play, not only in marketing but in the learning and construction processes of basketry as well. It became apparent that some framework, other than the individual craftsperson, would be necessary to adequately describe and discuss the organizational structures that seemed to be of significance to the whole basketry process. After much research, it became apparent that a social systems model would provide an adequate framework to discuss this type of phenomenon.

The social systems model is a cluster of theories that has emerged in several academic disciplines. While most widely used in sociology, in recent years it has also been utilized in anthropology, psychology, and in a variety of human service professions. The social systems model should not be confused with systems theory. While the social systems model has grown out of the general systems theory it should not be construed as a theory. The social systems model is an intellectual framework into which a variety of theories about personality and group interaction may be worked. The model, rather than being a description of the real world, is a transparency or map that is used to show how various elements of a phenomenon might be related.

Each component of the model to be presented in this
thesis (individual, family, and community) should be viewed as a holon. A holon, like the Greek god Janus, faces two directions at once: inward toward its own parts and outward to the system to which it is a part. In short, each entity presented should be perceived as being simultaneously a part and a whole. Therefore, the behavior within the system is not determined at any one level, part, or whole.

**Historical Background**

The history and tradition of basket making in the United States is an extremely long and complex one. Examining the historical background of white oak ribbed basketry will allow us to view such an activity in terms of its endurance and various modifications that have been brought about by the interactions of many different cultural groups. It may also reveal some important information concerning the dynamic and adaptive nature of folklore.

Centuries before the earliest Europeans reached the shores of America, basketry was a highly developed craft among numerous groups of Native Americans. Although some groups relied mainly on leather, birch bark, or pottery, necessity made basketry a major craft for many tribes.  

While most basketry items produced by Native Americans were

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used as part of daily living—such as transporting goods, storage, and food preparation—some were used for special purposes such as armor and religious worship.

Native Americans have used a wide variety of natural fibers in their basket weaving. Twining is one of the oldest techniques used by American Indians and involves twisting flexible fibers around each other before weaving them together. Materials used in twining include grasses, strands of bark and roots.

The origin of splintwork, the weaving of narrow flat strips such as cane, ash, or white oak, is the subject of considerable academic dispute. Some scholars believe that weaving with splits spread to the Northern Hemisphere from South and Central America. Another theory contends that the technique was learned from European immigrants, during the early seventeenth century, and then spread throughout Indian tribes in the Eastern United States and Canada.\(^1\) Despite the apparent confusion concerning the origin of splintwork among Indians in the Eastern United States, it is almost certain, despite some popular misconceptions to the contrary, that ribbed basketry was introduced to America by European immigrants.

Baskets of ribbed construction are common throughout Western Europe. Germany, Holland, Sweden, and the British

\(^1\)Ibid.
Isles all have various kinds of traditional baskets that utilize ribbed construction.\(^1\) By far the most common type of ribbed basket made in Western Europe is the melon shaped basket which is made of a variety of materials, most commonly willow. However, in Great Britain there is also a long standing tradition of making baskets of oak. This tradition is described by J. Geraint Jenkins in his essay "Some Country Basket Makers." In that article Jenkins states that

In the Wyre Forest of Worcestershire and in the Furness district of Lancashire, coppice grown commercially grown in a dense thicket oak provides the raw material for a once important industry; that of spale or spelk basket making. Until recently the craft was also practiced in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and Shropshire. These oval or round baskets are made of interwoven oak laths or spelks are still widely used in the Midlands and the North for carrying a great variety of products ranging from shellfish to coke and from animal fodder to cotton waste. In addition to its durability and toughness, the

advantage of the spale over the osier (willow) baskets is the closeness of its weave: indeed, so close is the weave that it is possible to carry powdery material in the spale basket.¹

Not only is the material used by these British basket makers similar to that used by basket makers in the Southern Highland, but also the manner in which trees are selected and prepared for use, as well as certain tools such as the froe, the shaving horse, and the drawknife.

The immigrants who left Great Britain and other countries in Western Europe for a new life in American brought with them their ideas about basket construction and form along with the rest of their cultural baggage. These immigrants not only brought their ideas, but also their tools such as those previously mentioned and familiar materials such as basket willow (*Salix purpurea*), a plant native to Europe. Some immigrants bought or bartered with Indians for baskets while other, like the Shakers (The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing), bought prepared splints from the Indians.² Whether white settlers learned about the presence of white oak and ash from Native Americans, or Native Americans learned construction of ash and white oak baskets from the new settlers, oak and ash quickly became the preferred material for most of the baskets constructed by both groups.

²Teleki, p. 58.
Baskets made of ash have traditionally been made in the northern tier of the Eastern United States since at least the early nineteenth century. While a few of the techniques used to make black ash baskets are similar to those used in white oak basketry, there are substantial differences. Perhaps the greatest difference is the manner in which these two types of wood are prepared for use. Black ash is pounded apart while white oak is split or riven apart. Another basic difference is that baskets made of black ash are always woven around a form, whereas this technique is rarely used with baskets made of white oak. Pounded ash basketry is present throughout northern New England and upstate New York—as well as northern Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. In Connecticut, the baskets are pounded and woven like those in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the Adirondack Mountains, but the wood commonly used is white oak rather than ash.

The regional distribution of white oak basketry and ribbed construction begins in Pennsylvania and stretches across the Southern Highlands through Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, northern Georgia, and Kentucky to


2 Michael Johnson, interviewed by Denis Kiely at the Duneland Folk Festival, Porter, Indiana, 10 July 1982.

3 Glassie, p. 41.
Fig. 2

Map of distribution
Missouri and Arkansas. South of this area, baskets of white oak are also constructed but ribbing techniques are not utilized.

The reason for this distribution is possibly the result of two different factors. Black ash (*Fraxinus nigra*) is much more populous in the northern part of the United States, while white oak is more populous in the Southern Highlands. Thus the basket makers in these two areas are partly responding to the raw materials present in their environment. The second factor is cultural in nature. Following both areas of distribution from east to west, it soon becomes apparent that the areas of distribution also follow the western movement of the early settlers. The migration of settlers from the Eastern Seaboard to such areas as Tennessee and Kentucky was earlier than the settlement of such areas as Michigan and Wisconsin, due to the fact that these latter areas were Indian territories until the early 1830s and that a large number of the settlers of the Old Northwest were from the New England area.

Historically, basketry was a skill practiced by many early pioneers whose lives demanded self-reliance. Thus many of the early basket makers were farmers who made baskets to fill primarily their own needs and those of their neighbors. Such activity provided supplementary income for the family unit, mostly goods acquired through barter. However, despite the romantic vision of the sole basket maker
presented by many authors, basket making was most often a family activity and quite frequently more than just a pickup or part-time activity.

Dantown, Connecticut, was a rural community in southwestern Connecticut that became a basket weaving center in the middle of the nineteenth century. John V. McClees chronicled the history of the Dantown basketry industry in an article that appeared in the May, 1931 issue of Antiques magazine:

Gradually its inhabitants began the making of baskets for sale in surrounding townships. By 1860 approximately forty families were engaged in the business. By 1880 the number had doubled, and the trade became so important that in an area of fifty miles square baskets were used as legal tender. The panic of 1893 marked the beginning of the industry’s decline.¹

The history of basket making in Dantown is chronicled in records, daybooks, and other historical manuscripts due to the fact that it was a well organized commercial industry that reflected the history and culture of New England. The history of basket making in the Mammoth Cave area is different and is not accessible through historical manuscripts such as daybooks, tax records, or census records. Due to the lifestyle of its participants, and the culture from which it grew, it is a history that has been stored in the recollections and memories of area residents and is accessible only through oral interviews.

Like all traditional craftspersons who take raw materials from nature and convert them into a finished product, the basket makers of the Mammoth Cave area are inextricably linked with their environment. Today, when so many of us use materials and goods that are transported over large geographic areas, it may be difficult to comprehend a group of people who gather their own materials, in their own way.

While it would be feasible to transport basketry materials almost anywhere, traditional baskets are almost always made close to the source of the materials. Harvesting and preparing material, such as white oak, requires a special knowledge of plant life and its surroundings, so that identification of a single tree for use is a complex decision that involves many variables.

Mr. Walter Logsdon, in an interview with Judi Sadowsky during June, 1974, related some of the ways to identify a white oak from its near relation, the forest oak:

A couple come out here a while back, brought some twigs off some tree and brought some acorns. Said they went up to Mammoth Cave trying to find somebody who could tell them what kind of tree it was. Couldn't find anybody to tell them. Said they run into somebody referred them to me. Brought them down here and I said, "Sure
I can tell you how it is. It's a white oak." Well they wanted to know how I could tell the difference between a white oak and a forest oak. Well, in the first place, there's a difference in the leaves, shape of the leaf, see. There's a fringe around there, see. You have a mid rib, then you have the veins coming out from the mid rib. Well on the outer edge there's little wrinkles in the leaf, you know, scallops. In a white oak and a forest oak they're different. Then the acorn of a white oak grows in a little cup and is nearly round. But the acorn of a forest oak also grows in a cup but it's long, longer than a white oak.1

However, there is more to the selection process than just the identification of a tree as a white oak. According to the specifications of the basket makers interviewed, it must be a relatively young white oak from four to eight inches in diameter (approximately thirty years of age) and free from knots. The final test used to decide whether the tree is suitable is described by Mr Logsdon:

I take out my ax and make a little chip and take me that chip out and look and see what the grain is like. If it is [straight], I take it down and bring it on in.2

By examining this chip from the trunk of the tree, the basket maker can see if the outer annual rings of the tree are large and regular and if the grain is fairly straight. If it is, the basket maker fells the tree with an ax, a crosscut saw, or, more commonly now, a gasoline powered chain saw. If the tree is judged to be unsuitable, the basket maker moves on. Unfortunately, this practice,


2Ibid.
while necessary, does damage the tree and sometimes causes the tree to die.

Basket making is often seen as a seasonal activity, the common perception being that there is a special time of the year when the maker must harvest his material. While this may be true of basket makers who use cane and grasses, the basket makers of the Mammoth Cave area had very different opinions concerning the best time of year to harvest trees. One stated that during the spring when "The sap was up" was the best time to cut timber.¹ Most basket makers contended that it was best to cut in the fall when "The sap was down."² Actually, white oak for baskets can be, and has been, cut year round. The reason for the preference of cutting in the fall is due to the fact that many individuals made baskets as a seasonal activity during the slower work pace of the fall and winter months. These individuals would cut a number of trees so as to have a supply on hand. It is also true that the timber cut in the late fall stays workable for a longer time, as it does not dry out as quickly as timber cut during warm weather.

As for as the best places to find good timber for baskets, basket makers were also of divided opinion. One

¹Ralph Burba, interviewed by Deborah Hall, Wax, Kentucky, 19 October 1977.
²Stanley Cottrell, interviewed by Elizabeth Harzoff, Hart County, Kentucky 19 September 1977.
basket maker stated that the best timber was found along creeks and rivers in low lying areas.\(^1\) Another stated that the best timber came from sandy soil on the southwest side of a hill.\(^2\) Whatever the preferred location of the basket maker, the trees selected had to have abundant moisture which would allow them to grow quickly and straight. The trees would also have to be sheltered from the prevailing winds, which can cause the trunk to be twisted, as well as harsh sunlight, which can stunt the growth of the tree. Both excessive winds and sunlight make the white oak virtually useless for basket making purposes.\(^3\)

Over a period of time, an individual or family might exhaust the suitable white oak on their own land or not have any suitable trees on their property. In some instances where this was the case, relatives or friends would permit cutting of suitable trees on their land. In other instances, it was necessary to buy standing timber or timber already cut and split. Prices paid for already split timber varied from five to twenty-five cents a stick.\(^4\)

The number of trees selected and felled at any one

\(^1\) Audie Dennison, interviewed by Keith Ludden, Cub Run, Kentucky, 5 September 1977.

\(^2\) Stanley Cottrell.

\(^3\) Marshall, p. 175.

\(^4\) Lilian Meredith, interviewed by Martin Ostrofsky and James Brown, Brownsville, Kentucky, 28 September 1977.
time depended on the time of year, the number of baskets to be made, and the availability of suitable trees. Once selected and felled, the trees were occasionally split on the site but, most often, were transported home for the task of splitting. This process was most commonly done in a yard or lot.

The process begins with the splitting of the log lengthwise, or board fashion, into equal halves. A few basket makers use an ax to begin splitting the log but the tool of preference continues to be a froe. Though once a commonplace sight in a farmer's toolshed, the froe is now an extremely rare tool. It is L shaped with the handle being about twenty inches long and the blade being about twelve inches long. The bottom of the blade is left dull to avoid biting into, or bruising the wood being split.¹

The froe is driven into the log with a wooden mallet, or maul. Between hitting the froe with the mallet and working the froe up and down and from side to side, it is driven into the log to a depth of nine or ten inches. A wooden wedge is then placed into the log just below the froe and the froe is removed. The wedge is then driven into the log with the wooder mallet. As the log begins to split farther and farther apart, a second wedge is placed below the first wedge. The first wedge is removed and the second wedge is driven into the log until there is enough space to place the

first wedge below the second. This process is continued, leap frog fashion, until the log splits into two halves. The log is then split, by the same process, into quarters, and finally eighths. Depending upon the size of the log and the strength of the splitter, it is possible to split halves and quarters using only a froe, and possibly a mallet.

Some basket makers utilize what is known as a brake, or pitch horse, to help in splitting the log.\(^1\) A brake, or pitch horse, can be the crotch of a fallen tree or even the space in-between the logs of a barn. The log is wedged into the brake so that it cannot move. This position allows the splitter to stand on either side of the log and gives the better leverage and control over the opening split.

Once the log is divided into the desired size, the sapwood is split from the heartwood. Known as a bastard, or with grain cut, a froe or large knife is placed into the growth ring that separates the darker heartwood from the lighter colored sapwood. After the knife or froe is tapped into the wood, it is worked back and forth until there is enough space to continue the splitting by hand. Once split, the sapwood is always saved. Some basket makers save the heartwood to use later as hoops and ribs, while others regard it as inferior and discard it.

\(^1\) Thomas Fenwick, interviewed by Michael Korn and Denis Kiely, Wax, Kentucky, 16 September 1977; and George Childress, interviewed by Denis Kiely, Park City, Kentucky, 12 March 1980.
The sapwood layer of a seven inch log is generally about two or three inches thick. After the sapwood is separated, it is split at least once more before the bark is removed. The bark is removed and the rough edges smoothed by using either a drawknife or a pocket knife. If a drawknife is used, the wood is dressed down on a shaving horse, or a rough approximation of one. Sometimes this device is no more than a long board with legs on to which the wood can be clamped while being shaved. The drawknife is pulled smoothly across the wood while at the same time being pulled in toward the body.

The bark and the rough edges of the timber are removed and then squared into splits, or pieces, three-quarters to one inch wide. The splits are then riven, or split, again until they are about one-quarter of an inch thick. Depending upon the type and number of baskets to be made, a certain amount of splits this size are cut to predetermined lengths and set aside to be used as the hoops and ribs of the basket.
Fig. 4

TOOLS

A. Draw-Knife  B. Froe  C. Mallet  D. Awl  E. Shaving horse
frame. The remaining splits are to be used in the actual weaving and are riven by hand with a pocket knife until they are approximately one-sixteenth to one-thirty-second of an inch wide, or about half the size of one year's growth ring. This part of the riving process is extremely delicate in that the wood being split has the tendency to run out, or split off to one side. Run outs occur most often on the thinnest side of the wood being split.

![Fig.5 Making splits](image)

A good basket maker will feel the run out as it begins. After examining the split to find out which direction the run out is going, a sharp jerk in the opposite direction is used to force the split back into line. These final splits are then scraped with a knife until they are smooth.
A rag or cloth is placed over the knee and the splits are pulled under the blade of the knife while the knife is held stationary over the cloth. The side of these thin splits are scraped of bad or thin spots and then finally cut to the desired lengths.

Fig. 6  Scraping splits

The preparing of timber for basket making is not necessarily done all at one time. Some basket makers prefer to have a large amount of workable timber on hand, especially during the winter months. A variety of methods are used to keep the timber from drying out after it has been initially split. One such method is to bury the timber in a dug trench. Methods used to rejuvinate partly dried out timber include soaking it in a pond, or trough, or even throwing it outside during a hard rain. Once the splits used for the weaving are prepared, they can be kept for a much longer period of time, needing only to be soaked in a bucket for a few hours.
to become workable again.

The making of the hoops begins the actual process of framing, or constructing, a basket. Some basket makers use the darker heartwood of the white oak for their hoops. If the heartwood is used, it is riven in the same manner as the sapwood until the splits are three-quarters to an inch wide and about one-quarter of an inch thick. Whether heartwood or sapwood is utilized, the size of the splits used to make the hoops is the same. A large number of the basket makers mentioned that hickory could also be used for the hoops. However, none of the basket makers interviewed used anything other than white oak in constructing their baskets.

Once the splits to be made into hoops are prepared, they are scraped smooth and cut with a handsaw. The lengths of the splits are determined by the size of the baskets to be made. Sometimes a ruler, or measuring stick, is used to measure the length of the hoop. Mr. Walter Logsdon describes another method used by basket makers:

I learned that I could stand flat-footed, like this, and measure the end level with my chin and that's exactly sixty inches, and that's how long my handle hoop for the bushel basket had to be. Measured by knowing my own height. Then these little baskets like this I got peck basket, that comes halfway to the chest, right there. . . . And the miniature basket, twenty-six inches, that's about the length of my arm.¹

The hoop, having been cut, is then bent into an almost circular shape. Occasionally, the hoop is bent around a tree,

or log, or even a door-knob but most basket makers seem to prefer to bend them strictly by hand. After the hoop is bent into shape, it is overlapped about two inches. The hoop is then nailed together with wire brads, or other small nails, and a hammer. As two hoops are used in every ribbed basket, another hoop of approximately the same size is constructed in the same fashion. The two hoops are then crossed at right angles, one inside the other. The outer vertical hoop will serve as the base and handle of the basket while the inner horizontal hoop will serve as the rim of the basket.

The actual weaving process begins with the weaving of the burr, or ear, of the basket. The thin weaving splits are woven around the intersection of the two hoops, thus making the burr. The burr is extremely important as it serves to stabilize the two hoops into a fixed position, and will also be used later in holding the ribs of the basket in place.

In some areas where ribbed baskets are made, the weaving of the burr is elaborated into a design known as a four fold pattern that resembles a design commonly known as a god's eye. In such cases, the burr serves an ornamental role as well as a functional one.¹ While no such ornamentation is practiced in the Mammoth Cave area, basket makers of the area are extremely critical of the weaving of the burr.

They consider it a crucial step in the basket's construction and a reflection of the craftsmanship of the basket maker.

Once the burr is completed, the ribs of the basket are slowly added. The ribs are whittled down from splits until they are of the proper size and smoothness. The size and shape of the ribs depend on the individual basket maker. Some basket makers only use ribs that are somewhat round, while others use flatter ribs for the bottom of the basket. The size of the ribs varies from basket makers who use only one size of rib for each type of basket to those who use longer ribs at the bottom of the basket and smaller ribs toward the top.

The ribs are inserted into the burr of the basket with the aid of a tool known as a basket awl, or pegging awl. This tool is, most often, homemade from a nail driven through a piece of wood and then filed down to a sharp point. The awl is used to punch a small hole into the burr. The ends of the ribs are whittled down so that they can be inserted into the hole made by the awl. In this manner, four to six ribs are placed on either side of the hoop, forming the bottom of the basket. Some basket makers also place two ribs above the hoops that forms the mouth of the basket so that the weaving splits will not be cut by the sharp edges of the hoop when pulled tight. The initial ribs in place, the weaving process begins.
A. Nailing the first hoop
B. Two hoops completed
C. Close-up of burr
D. Adding the ribs
All the basket makers in the Mammoth Cave area use the same type of weave in constructing their ribbed baskets. Known as a randing stroke, it consists of alternating rows of over and under weaving and is similar to that used by British spale basket makers.\(^1\) Once four rows of weaving are completed, two more ribs are added to each side. These, and all additional ribs, are often called brace ribs and are inserted into the actual weave of the basket, rather than the burr. This process of adding ribs into the weave continues until all of the required ribs are inserted. The actual number of ribs varies depending on the size of the basket. The remaining splits necessary to complete the basket are then woven into place.

The weaving is accomplished by starting a single split on one side of the basket until only the end of the split is left. Both ends of the split are tucked into the weave so that they cannot be seen. The same process is then repeated on the other side of the basket. Alternating from one side to another, the weaving is continued until the basket is complete.

Ribbed baskets are the most common form of basket made from white oak and come in a variety of sizes. Referred to occasionally as farm baskets, ribbed baskets played an important role as containers for the carrying and storing

\(^1\)Jenkins, p. 192.
of goods, and as instruments for measuring those goods. The quality of a basket maker's work was judged not only on how well the basket was constructed, but on how it worked as an instrument of measure. One informant mentioned Charlie Beeler as being a good basket maker in the following terms:

> It took him Charlie Beeler longer to make a basket. . . . He got more for it . . . a good full bushel. Some of them would be a little skimpy on the bushel size, they'd make them a little smaller. But he made a good full bushel and he took pains with it, and it was a nice basket and a good basket.¹

One basket maker mentioned seeing a five bushel

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¹Rector Childress, interviewed by James Brown, Cub Run, Kentucky, 14 September 1977.
basket, a rare oddity, as a child.¹ Mr. Walter Logsdon described the various sizes of ribbed baskets made during his youth:

Now some of them made a . . . two bushel basket, great big thing that'd hold two bushels. . . . And this was the bushel basket, or the feed basket. . . . The bushel basket, well you kept it at the barn to carry corn. We'd go to the crib and fill the bushel basket with corn and we'd go over here and feed this old horse and go over there and feed that one. . . . There actually was a specific use made of the peck basket. It was called an egg basket. They'd gather the eggs in it, you know, and carry it off to the grocery store in the peck basket. . . . Now there was a half bushel basket come between these two. They'd sometimes, a particularly out in the rural communities, women would raise chickens to sell, and they a set the old hen on twelve, fifteen eggs and hatch off a little bunch of chickens. And all the roosters that was in that group, they'd feed them till they got to weighing about two or three pounds, and they put them in that half bushel basket and . . . put that on their arm and carry them to the store and sell them. . . . The miniature basket was what they called the sewing basket. Women kept their needles and thread, and so on, and things like that in the little basket, like that one hanging yonder.²

There are two other kinds of ribbed baskets made by basket makers in the Mammoth Cave area: the wall basket and the toy basket. The wall basket consists of a half basket, similar in size to half of a miniature basket, with a flat back. The flat back permits this basket to be hung on a nail or hook directly against the wall. The toy basket is the smallest of the ribbed baskets, being only two or three inches in diameter. While serving no real functional purpose,

¹George Childress.

Fig. 9 Basket types

Bushel

Half-bushel

Peck

Round
the toy basket is used as a decorative item, and is considered to be a testament to the ingenuity and tactile skill of the basket maker.

Ribbed baskets can also be decorated in a number of fashions. Such decorated baskets are locally referred to as fancy baskets. Decorative elements are never added to the bushel basket, but are reserved for use on peck and smaller sized baskets. One method of decoration is to weave splits around the handle of the basket. Thin ribs are placed on either side of the handle, and then thin splits are woven
along the entire length of the handle. However, the most noticeable form of decoration is dyeing the basket.

Once a common practice, dyeing of smaller ribbed baskets is done only occasionally at the present time. Choice of color depends on the taste of the individual basket maker. Natural dyes used include walnut hulls, walnut bark and roots, polkberries, and coffee. However, with the advent of commercial dyes, most basket makers switched to dyes that were available at local stores. The most popular and most extensively used was Putnam's Fadeless Dye. In the words of one informant, "I don't know what they used, but after Putnam dyes came out, that was what everybody used." After Putnam dyes were no longer made, basket makers switched to the use of Rit Dye. The use of natural dyes did not completely disappear when commercial dyes became available. During bad winter weather, or time of economic hardship like the 1930s, some basket makers continued to use natural dyes.

The extent and style of dyeing again depends on the taste of the individual craftsperson. In the past, sometimes the entire basket would be dyed one color. This is rarely, if ever, done now. The most popular form of dyeing, in the past and the present, is to dye a number of the weaving splits then weave them into the basket to form

1Ibid; and Susette Barret, interviewed by Denis Kiely, Cave City, Kentucky, 30 September 1977.

striped patterns. Favorite patterns include one colored stripe per side, multi-striped, chain link, and checks. Patterns are always on the side of ribbed baskets, never on the bottom. With the multi-striped pattern, sometimes the stripes were all one color, sometimes each stripe was a different color, or only two or three colors were used. However, each stripe was never more than one color. The choice of color and design is up to the basket makers discretion. In the words of one informant, "Well, you can dye them any color you wanted to. You'd have red or green, . . . then you'd weave them in checks or whatever design you wanted."¹

Ribbed baskets are the most predominate type of basket made in the Mammoth Cave area, but there is a variety of

¹Ralph Burba.
baskets that are not of ribbed construction. Baskets made of willow are not unknown in the area, but they were always a minor tradition and are extremely rare today. There are also baskets made of white oak that do not use ribbed construction. These baskets require skills similar to those necessary to the construction of ribbed baskets and are often made by the same basket makers who make ribbed baskets. However, in these types of baskets ribs are never used, and hoops only rarely. Rather than ribs, these baskets depend upon the use of stakes for form and cohesiveness. Baskets that utilize stake construction include the round basket, the flowers or magazine basket, and the clothes baskets. Two other baskets called sandwich trays and scrap dishes were described by several informants, but no examples of either basket was ever found in the course of research.\(^1\)

In this style of basketry, stakes serve as the warp, through which the splits are woven. The stakes, at first, look the same as the splits, but they are thicker and provide support that the thinner splits could not. Stakes baskets typically use a border as an edge rather than a hoop. The exception to this rule is the round basket, which uses a hoop for the rim, or mouth, of the basket. Alternate stakes are bent around the border and then reinserted into the weave. The other stakes are cut even with the border and then cover-

\(^1\)Stanley Cottrell; and Walter Logsdon, 15 July 1974.
er by splits that are woven around the border to strengthen it. Handles of stake baskets appear similar to the hoops used in ribbed baskets. The difference is that stake basket handles have open ends that are inserted into the bottom of the basket and are held tight by weaving them firmly into place. Although different techniques are used in the construction of stake baskets, as opposed to ribbed baskets, the people of the area see little or no difference in quality between the two. The important factors are what the baskets are used for and the skill of the basket maker in making any basket.

The care and skill involved in making white oak baskets is reflected in the age of many baskets. When properly care for, white oak baskets are known to last from fifty to one hundred years. A Cherokee Indian basket made from white oak and now in the possession of the British National Museum is over two hundred and fifty years old.¹ Such longevity is due, in part, to the sturdiness of white oak, but it is mostly a testimonial to the craftsmanship of the people who made them. The basket makers made them not as decorative pieces, but as functional items made to last through years of use.

Older baskets are in extremely high demand among antique dealers and collectors now. Among the basket makers of the Mammoth Cave area, older baskets are also highly

¹Teleki, p. 8.
coveted, not because of their economic value but because of their emotional significance. Several of the basket makers interviewed have baskets over fifty years old that were made by members of their family, many of whom are now deceased. Their pride in having such an heirloom is unmistakable, and is much more than the simple possession of such an artifact. These baskets provide an important symbolic connection, a connection to family and community history. Baskets and basket making are much more than a simple craft to these people. They are a reflection of a way of life that is quickly being forgotten in the pace of twentieth century life. To truly understand the importance, and the very nature, of this traditional craft, it is essential to examine the historical and social context in which basket making has existed in the Mammoth Cave area.
CHAPTER III

HEY JAKE, I MADE A TRADE AND SOLD
THE ONE THAT NIMROD MADE

A History of the Basket Industry

The basket industry in the Mammoth Cave area was overwhelmingly located within a ten mile radius of Cub Run, Kentucky. For the purposes of this paper, it will be called the Wax-Cub Run area. Geographically, the Wax-Cub Run area is on the western extreme of the Pennyroyal region of Kentucky and on the eastern border of the Western Coal Field. Politically, the area encompasses the common borders of Hart, Edmonson, and Grayson Counties. It is often referred to as a part of the Northern Clifty area. That name more than adequately describes the predominate geological feature of the area: the sandstone cliffs along most of the major streams, including the Nolin River. Most of the land surrounding the Wax-Cub Run area is composed of a sandstone cap overlying a limestone base. The result is that most of the topography is not rough but rolling. Where streams like the Nolin have broken through the sandstone beds to the limestone beneath, however, there are conspicuous escarpments of sand-
Fig. 12

A. State of Kentucky

B. Wax-Cub Run Area

A. State of Kentucky  B. Wax-Cub Run Area
stone, as high as two hundred feet in some areas.\textsuperscript{1}

The land lying between the Nolin and Green Rivers offered a great deal to early settlers. The virgin forests provided timber for houses and barns, while the bottom lands promised fertile soil for crops. It is difficult to ascertain exactly when people first began to settle in this area. The first settlers obtained their land in one of two ways. The first way was through army grants that the government gave to veterans of the Revolutionary War. The second method was to homestead property by settling on it and making improvements. The earliest known land grant for the Wax-Cub Run area, then part of Jefferson County, Virginia, was awarded to a Revolutionary War veteran, one Samuel Watkins, on August 14, 1783. Whenever people did start to settle in the area, it is generally conceded that people were living in the section before 1800.\textsuperscript{2} These settlers came mostly from Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee and were mostly of English, Scotch-Irish, and German descent. While it is unknown which individuals or families brought basket making to the area, there is a popular opinion that favors the Jaggers family. In any event, at least four

\textsuperscript{1}Carl. O. Sauer, \textit{Geography of the Pennyroyal} (Frankfort: Kentucky Geological Survey, 1927), p. 42.

family names later associated with basket making (Cottrell, Dennison, Jaggers, and Logsdon) are mentioned in a tax list of 1819. ¹

Unlike the eastern section of Hart County, whose rich and flat soil gave rise to slave owning plantations, the settlers in the Wax-Cub Run area were mostly subsistence farmers that owned few, if any, slaves. Other than crops and livestock grown for their own needs, the main cash crop of the area was tobacco, along with a little hemp and corn. Because of the extreme lack of roads before the Civil War, goods for sale had to be shipped by flatboat down the Green and Nolin Rivers. From the Green and Nolin Rivers, the boats would travel down the Ohio to the Mississippi River and the gulf port of New Orleans, the commercial center for many interior settlements. ² Due, in part, to the transportation problem, there were few commercial enterprises in the area except for a few stores and mills, until after the Civil War.

The depression that followed the Civil War was an extremely difficult period for many Americans, and those living in the Wax-Cub Run area were no exception. Money was extremely difficult to come by as the price being offered for tobacco, the main cash crop of the area, was extremely low. It was during this difficult period, while banks and

²Anderson Childress.
businesses closed around the country, that one of the first commercial enterprises arose in the Wax-Cub Run area: the making and peddling of grindstones by John W. Childress and his sons.

Anderson Childress, great-grandson of John W. Childress, described this family business in an interview with John Marshall and Judith Schottenfeld in 1977:

There was a sandstone quarry on my great-grandfather Childress' old farm down at Old Maple, below Cub Run. They found that it was perfect grit for grindstones, made ideal grindstones, and some of them, now I'm not sure who did this, I think Tom Morrison [Childress]. . . . maybe he was the best, all of them were masons incidentally. . . . They were pretty good workmen in stone. My great-grandfather also built chimneys and worked in stone. But anyway, one of them perfected a device to cut these grindstones by mule power with a sweep, you know, the mule walked around in a circle. . . . They turned this stone and they used chisels, or some sort of cutters, and water. They could make a couple or three a day. It didn't take long to fill the needs of the community, so they had excess grindstones. So Uncle Ben [Benjamin Franklin Childress] apparently was the first one who took them out to sell. Now, I've heard my father talk about when he was very small, Uncle Ben had been to the Shaker village down at Auburn. It seems to me, he must have been on one of his peddling, trading, trips with a wagon and team. It didn't take many grindstones to make a wagon load.\(^1\)

While basically a family owned and operated business, the peddling of grindstones laid the groundwork for a larger more lucrative financial venture, the long distance peddling of baskets.

It is not possible to determine exactly when baskets were first hauled out of the Wax-Cub Run area but an educated

\(^1\)Ibid.
Around 1875, a dirt road, known locally as the Carrico Road, was completed connecting the area to Munfordville, Leitchfield, and Clarksville. That road, and other new or improved roads in the vicinity, permitted travel that previously would have been difficult, if not impossible.

The two earliest figures involved in the long distance peddling of baskets were Benjamin Franklin Childress, who had previously peddled grindstone, and Nimrod Jaggers. While there is some disagreement as to which of these gentlemen peddled baskets first, the fact that these two men were contemporaries leads to the assumption that basket making was already a fairly widespread craft in the area.

It is probable that some store owners were accepting baskets in trade for store goods before long distance peddling began, due to the lack of money in circulation during the depression of the 1870s. The long distance peddling of baskets might possibly have been a response to an overabundance of baskets at local stores that were accepting them as barter but could not sell them locally. In any case, the beginning of long distance peddling made bartering of baskets

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1 Ibid.
2 Hart County, 6: p.4.
3 Anderson Childress; and Stanley Cottrell.
at local stores a common practice that lasted through the 1930s. Not all merchants accepted baskets in barter, especially the small stores with a limited stock of supplies, but most did.

In trade, merchants offered fifteen to twenty-five cents worth of goods per basket around the turn of the century, and from twenty-five to forty cents a basket during the 1930s. If the total amount was not spent, the merchant would write out a bill due in the name of the person trading the basket. Like script, it could be used to buy more goods in that store at some point in the future. The oldest known record of such a transaction is located in a journal of Dr. R. C. Crandon, who owned a store in Cub Run, dated April 8, 1885. The entry reads, "One basket credit twenty-five cents to Willie Waddel."¹ Merchants rarely, if ever, paid any basket maker cash.²

Many of the basket makers depended on such income to provide them with things like coffee, sugar, kerosene, soda, and calico. As subsistence farmers, they raised most of what they needed but basket making provided them with a way of obtaining things that they could not grow or make themselves. Mrs. Lilian Meredith remembered this particular incident from her youth:

¹Anderson Childress.
²Lilian Meredith
You know, my dad had to take my mother in for an operation. That was, I guess, in the early thirties... and I remember me and my brother, I was about somewhere like fifteen, maybe sixteen years old, he was younger, and I decided I'd make baskets that week. And of course, we still had to make them for food too, but I decided that I'd double up on my work and make enough extra to buy him some new clothes for school. So, I went and jumped in and, I think, I made twenty-two or three that week of peck baskets. We... traded them and I remember getting a new pair of shoes, a new pair of overalls, and a jacket.¹

It was not unusual for a good basket maker to make two or three baskets a day, once the timber was prepared. Walker Thompson of Cub Run remembered that his mother could make from twenty to thirty baskets a week.² Even more baskets could be produced if the family worked together. Mrs. Meredith described how her family made baskets together as a unit during the 1930s:

Well, the way we usually would do it was to get all the timber out in one day and the next day we would frame them... Now some of use littler kids, we'd be doing one thing when our mother and dad would be doing something else. They'd be putting the ribs in... we'd call it ribbing them off, and after the ribs was put in, after they got... oh, no more than just working on the bottom, then we took over and filled them out on the rest of the way up... We'd work all day on them. When feeding time comes, and milking time, why the ones that was big enough to do that type of work went on and done that. The others just remained working, till the table was set and eating time come and then we ate, and then we went back to work... I think all the family together would make as high as, sometimes, fifty a week.³

¹Lilian Meredith.
²Walker Thompson, interviewed by Molly Collins and Lynwood Montell, Cub Run, Kentucky, 1 October 1977.
³Lilian Meredith.
Fifty baskets a week, when traded to the local stores, could bring in between twelve and a half to twenty dollars a week in credit during the 1930s and between seven and a half to twelve and a half dollars around the turn of the century. Considering that hiring out as a farm hand, during both periods, generally paid about fifty cents a day, basket making was a realistic way to bring in extra cash. For a few families, basket making was the main source of income. For most, it was a sideline activity.

The amount of profit the store owner made on baskets depended on how much he sold them for as well as to whom they were sold. The owner was assured some profit, even if he ended up selling them for the same amount he had paid for them in barter and script. The profit was assured because he had bought the goods wholesale and then traded those same goods to basket makers at retail prices. Store owners generally seemed to have sold baskets to the peddlers for the same retail price or for a little more. However, some of the store owners, upon occasion, peddled baskets themselves, thereby maximizing their profits.

Although baskets became a kind of currency usable at local stores, they did provide some problems for the store owners. If a store owner did decide to peddle baskets, he would have to find someone, such as a wife or other relative,

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1Stanley Cottrell.
who was willing to run the store while he was gone. A few store owners, such as Letti Thompson of Hart County, sold their baskets to merchants in other states by parcel post. This was not, however, a common practice. On the other hand, having to wait for someone peddling baskets to come around and buy meant having to wait as long as six months. Several of the informants interviewed stated that it was not unusual to see the back rooms and attics of stores packed to the ceilings with baskets. For a store owner to have a thousand baskets was not uncommon. Besides the obvious problem of where to store so many baskets, the owner frequently had to wait a long time to get his initial investment back. Correctly handled, however, such a venture could mean substantial profits. At least one peddler, Elijah Thomas Childress, is said to have opened a store just so he could trade the store goods for baskets.

Basket makers were also known to peddle baskets from time to time. Lilian Meredith's father, Grover Cleveland Gunterman, would save baskets made by the family that were not needed to buy necessities. When enough baskets had been saved, around one or two hundred, he would load them on a wagon and peddle them himself. Such trips with a wagon and team would take two to three weeks, during which time

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1 Susette Barret.  
2 Rector Childress.  
3 Anderson Childress.
Mr. Gunterman always sold all of his baskets. To his family's knowledge, in the eighteen years that Grover Gunterman peddled his family's baskets, he never left the state.¹

While many basket makers and some store owners peddled baskets, they did so on a local basis, within the state, and generally only made one or two trips a year. The fact is that most of these occasional peddlers learned how to peddle baskets from one of the major peddlers.

When Benjamin Franklin Childress and Nimrod Jaggers first began to haul baskets out of the area, the market for baskets was completely undeveloped. One of their major accomplishments was the development of a wide ranging market for their product. It was a common practice for both of these men to take younger men along with them to help. One of those young men, Elijah Thomas Childress, a nephew of Benjamin Childress, was to become the most famous of all the basket peddlers.

Elijah Thomas Childress, known locally as Lijah Tom, Lige, and E. T., began in the peddling business by helping Nimrod Jaggers, and later his Uncle Benjamin. Around 1881, Lijah Tom began to peddle baskets on his own. From the beginning, his operation was extremely organized. During the 1870s and the early 1880s, a number of railroad lines were constructed in Hart, Edmonson, and Grayson Counties. Lijah

¹Lilian Meredith.
Tom took full advantage of this new convenience in transportation. Anderson Childress described how Lijah Tom used the railroads as part of his operation:

My father was a contemporary of Lijah Tom. He was a first cousin to Lijah Tom. He said that when Lige first started, he would ship . . . on the train . . . maybe one thousand or so [caskets] to a point like Fulton, Kentucky or Hickman, Kentucky, and he would start out with a load on his wagon. If he got them sold by the time he got to Hickman, he would pick these others up at the freight depot and go on from there. He was organized.¹

Lijah Tom’s trips would often last more than a month and sometimes as long as three months. On these longer trips, he would arrange to have a number of shipments sent in a staggered order to various locations. By being in town a few days early, he could find buyers before the shipment arrived. On several occasions, Lijah Tom left his wagon at home and traveled on the train. His son, Rector Childress, (known as Rec) explained:

He would carry . . . two . . . maybe three . . . sample baskets with him. A big one, a bushel basket, and maybe a half bushel, and a peck basket. He carried them with him . . . on the train . . . When he went to town, why he just carried this basket to all the stores and showed them what he had for sale, and they bought them. Then of course, . . . they’d just go out theirself, to the depot, and bring them in.²

Traveling in this fashion enabled Lijah Tom to travel and peddle baskets far outside the normal peddling routes. On one occasion, he peddled baskets to Chattanooga, Tennessee,

¹Anderson Childress.
²Rector Childress.
and on another occasion to St. Louis and Springfield, Missouri. Although the railroad had an important role in Lijah Tom's peddling, his standard operation utilized the railroad only to ship baskets to the locations he desired. Lijah Tom's primary method of transportation and selling baskets was a mule, or horse, team and wagon.

Most peddlers used what is commonly referred to as a road wagon. The road wagon was popular because of its ability to carry around three thousand pounds of cargo. The wagon also had large wheels in the back and smaller wheels in the front. The sills and floor of the wagon were made of light wood, probably chestnut and poplar. For peddling baskets, the bed of the wagon was lengthened to between sixteen and twenty feet. A basket frame, similar to a hay frame, was then constructed above the wagon bed. The frame was spread out at the top so that it could accommodate more baskets. The baskets were then nested inside one another, the peck inside the half bushel and the half bushel inside the bushel. Four bushel baskets, with the others nested inside, were then lashed together and loaded into the frame. Once loaded, a wagon with frame could hold between two hundred to four hundred baskets. Directly behind the wagon seat was an area for storing pots, pans, and extra clothes. Made out of wood or a tarpaulin, it also provided shelter for the peddler during rain storms. A tarpaulin large enough to cover the basket frame was also carried to protect the bas-
kets in case of inclement weather.

The road wagon had one unfortunate drawback in that it had an exceptionally hard ride. Because of that fact, Lijah Tom switched to using a spring wagon. The spring wagon differed from the road wagon in that there were large springs between the wagon bed and the axles. While heavier, the spring wagon had a much smoother ride. Outfitted in the same fashion as the road wagon, the spring wagon was Lijah Tom's favorite method of peddling baskets.¹

If he had enough help, Lijah Tom would sometimes use two or three wagons. When more than one wagon was involved, each one would be driven down a different road. A central location would be chosen each morning, before starting out, and the peddlers would meet there that night. This arrangement permitted the peddlers to cover a large area in a shorter period of time.²

Baskets were sold along the road to farmers and anyone else who might need a basket. Peddlers would also occasionally travel to the larger cities. The biggest sales, however, were almost always made in the towns along the way. Generally, peddlers would pull their wagons into the town square and sell their baskets there. If a town had an ordinance against peddling, the wagons were parked outside of town one one of the main roads. Monday was considered to be an

¹Anderson Childress; and Rector Childress.
²Rector Childress.
Fig. 13 Peddling baskets in the town square
especially good day due to the fact that the county court was usually in session. That meant that there would be more people in town. Peddlers would often plan to arrive on the outskirts of a town on Sunday evening. They would then make a camp just outside of town to get an early start the next morning. Camping while out on the road was the manner in which most evenings ended. There were times, however, when the night might be spent at the local livery stable or at a friend's house.¹

The price that the peddlers charged per basket varied with the type of buyer. To individuals, the retail price varied from one dollar to a dollar and a quarter per basket. Peddlers also made wholesale arrangements with store owners. The price depended on the number of baskets ordered, the larger the order, the lower the price. Rec Childress remembers his father, Lijah Tom, selling baskets to a hardware store in Evansville, Indiana, for nine dollars per dozen bushel baskets.² Sometimes peddlers accepted goods in trade for baskets—such as clothes, livestock, or leather harnesses for the wagon team—but a cash transaction was preferred.

The peddling routes traveled by Lijah Tom Childress' wagons stretched across most regions of Kentucky as well as

¹Stanley Cottrell; and Rector Childress.

²Rector Childress.
areas of Ohio, Indiana, and Tennessee. There were two basic routes traveled by wagon: one that extended to the east and another that reached west. The first route included the Bluegrass region of Kentucky, the Ohio River area of north-central Kentucky, and adjoining areas of Ohio and Indiana. The second route stretched from the Western Coal Field to the towns along the Ohio River in western Kentucky, adjoining areas of Indiana, as well as western Tennessee and southcentral Kentucky. To travel either of these routes with a wagon and team would take at least a month, possibly longer.

Rec Childress outlined a peddling trip he took with his father along the eastern route:

We started out . . . and went through by Priceville and Bonnieville and up to where . . . Sonora's at. He turned right there and went up through Hodgenville. So the first night that I ever camped out was about three miles the other side of Hodgenville. . . . We left out and went through New Haven and up through Lebanon, Kentucky. I believe from Lebanon we went on through Danville and to Richmond. Then we went from Richmond across to Lexington. . . . As we went up, we missed Franklin, the state capitol. After we left Maysville, we come down through Brooksville and Falmouth, Kentucky. . . . Sometimes we'd come to Covington, that's just this side of Cincinnati, and then we'd come down through Williamstown and Falmouth and Frankfort. . . . We'd come on through Shelbyville and down through Taylorsville and Barstown, back through New Haven and then home.¹

Though the route traveled by peddlers like Lijah Tom might be basically the same, making variations in the route was a common practice. The large scale peddlers would often

¹Ibid.
Fig. 14 Two routes traveled by Elijah Tom and Rector Childress

Wagon route
Truck route
seek out new markets in towns they had not previously visited. In this fashion, the routes were slowly enlarged. On one trip along the western route, Lijah Tom and Rec Childress peddled baskets to within forty miles of Memphis, Tennessee.¹

The occasional peddlers rarely, if ever, took trips as long as the large scale peddlers. The trips made by these occasional peddlers would generally cover only part of the longer routes, lasting as long as it took to sell one load of baskets.

Since the young men in that area had very few opportunities to travel, assisting a peddler must have been an exciting experience for them. Rec Childress had the following comments about his first peddling trips:

I really enjoyed it, yes I did. I enjoyed it. Because when you got up of a morning, why especially the first trips, why I was going somewhere new. . . . It was a challenge to you, you know. You'd get up of a morning and start out and you'd wonder, "Well, how many baskets will I sell today. Will it be a good day or will it be a bad one."²

The peddling of baskets by wagon continues to be the preferred method for over forty years. During the late 1920s, however, it became necessary for peddlers to adopt a new method of transportation. The number of automobiles on the road had been steadily increasing. As that number grew,

¹Ibid.
²Ibid.
it became more and more dangerous to be out on the road with a wagon and team. Around 1928, Lijah Tom began exclusively using a truck to peddle baskets. Other peddlers quickly followed suit. A frame, similar to those used on wagons, was constructed on the back of the truck. While a truck could not hold near the amount of baskets that a wagon could, it greatly increased the range of peddling operations.

After switching to trucks, peddlers began to operate further into Ohio and Indiana. They also began to operate in states that they had not previously peddled in with a wagon, such as Illinois and Missouri.

A few years after he began to use a truck, Lijah Tom's operation began to decline. Lijah Tom had the habit of buying used trucks that were not in the best of condition. The cost of maintenance and repair made it harder and harder to turn a profit. This fact was compounded by Lijah Tom's advancing age. Elijah Thomas Childress made his last peddling trip a few years before his death in 1946.¹

Other individuals from the Mammoth Cave area were also peddling baskets during the late 1920s and through the 1930s. Stanley Cottrell had peddled baskets with Lijah Tom on wagons and had driven a truck for him in 1928. Stanley, who was still a teenager, managed to also talk his father into going on their own peddling trip with a wagon and team.

¹Anderson Childress; Rector Childress; and Stanley Cottrell, interviewed by Elizabeth Harzoff, Hart County, Kentucky, 14 September 1977.
In 1930, while still in high school, Stanley bought a new Ford A model truck to use for peddling. During the school year, he would sometimes leave school to go peddling baskets for a week or two. His trips during the summer months were much longer, often lasting two or three months, and would often stretch over five states.¹

The Wax-Cub Run area went through other significant changes in the 1930s. The formation of Mammoth Cave National Park out of privately owned land displaced some area residents. Several thousand acres of good timber land were also absorbed into the park, thus depriving community members of its use. On the other hand, Mammoth Cave National Park did provide employment for a number of local residents. As part of the Roosevelt administration's effort to assist the nation's recovery from the depression, organizations such as the Works Progress Administration and the Tennessee Valley Authority also offered new opportunities for employment. People across the country began leaving farm life for the benefits of full-time employment. The Mammoth Cave area was no exception.

In the words of one informant,

> When Roosevelt went in, everything began to bloom. It [basket making] slowed down... People that could work, they got jobs.²

While the number of basket makers was decreasing,

¹Stanley Cottrell, 14 September 1977.

²Mrs. Ralph Burba, interviewed by Deborah Hall, Wax, Kentucky, 19 October 1977.
there were also changes in the market for baskets. Farmers had always been one of the major markets. Agricultural changes forced those who continued to farm to modernizing their methods and equipment. Thus the farmers no longer needed baskets as storage containers. The sale of baskets to tourist and souvenir shops helped to replace part of that market. During the 1920s and 1930s, roadside tourist stands appeared along Highways 31W and 31E, the major north-south arteries through the area. Peddlers, like Stanley Cottrell, began to sell more and more of their baskets to these stands and souvenir shops as the major market of the past began to disappear. The onset of the Second World War brought even more changes. Gas rationing hurt the tourist industry and the sale of baskets at roadside stands. At the same time, factory jobs were attracting even more people to leave their farms for industrial centers in the North.

Following the Second World War, basket making and peddling continued a slow decline. Most stores in the area stopped taking baskets in trade. A few stores began to pay cash for baskets. Thomas Alvey's store in Wax, however, continued to trade for baskets. Thomas Alvey took the baskets he traded for and sold them to tourist shops, as well as roadside stands. If Alvey's clients were outside the local area, the order was shipped parcel post. Thomas Alvey's sons, Leroy and Curtis, inherited the store after their father's death in 1960 and continued to deal in baskets.
Leroy and Curtis Alvey appear to be the last individuals who attempted to peddle baskets made in the Wax-Cub Run area. On several occasions in the early 1960s, Leroy took several truck loads of baskets to Indiana and one load to Max, Missouri. The last known attempt to peddle baskets was by Curtis Alvey in 1975. The Alvey brothers sold the baskets they peddled almost exclusively to merchants that had previously agreed to pay them on delivery.

The Alveys' business was based on between twenty to twenty-five families in the area that were still making baskets. In 1959, the Army Corps of Engineers began construction of a dam to create a reservoir on the Nolin River. Completed in 1963, the subsequent flooding of the Nolin River valley caused most of these families to move out of the area, thus crippling the last real basket making unit of any importance. The Alveys' original store was also covered by the reservoir, but one was built along a new road. The brothers later sold that store. Leroy now owns and operates The Trading post, a souvenir shop outside Cave City. Leroy still supplies baskets to gift stores at a few state parks that will pay him for delivery.

In 1967, Leroy and Curtis Alvey decided to open a

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1Lynwood Montell, personal communication.

2The majority of information concerning the Alvey brothers is contained in James Brown, "Zen and the Art of Basket Making" (term paper, Western Kentucky University, 1977), pp. 4-8.
factory to produce woodcrafts and baskets. It was their intention to have the baskets constructed in an assembly line fashion somewhat similar to that traditionally used by families. After finding a few local craftspeople to work at their factory, the Department of Labor intervened to make sure that the minimum wage of $1.65 per hour would be paid. Considering that baskets smaller than a bushel then sold for about two dollars, the venture closed before it ever opened.¹

Today, most of the remaining basket makers sell directly to any interested parties. A few still sell to middle-men like Leroy Alvey but most prefer to handle the sales themselves and maximize their profits. With the relative scarcity of ribbed baskets, bushel baskets now sell for between thirty-five to fifty dollars and peck baskets for twenty to thirty dollars. Basket makers have little problem finding buyers. In fact, most readily admit that they cannot make enough to satisfy the demand. Rather than having to seek out clients or ship baskets parcel post, now the buyer seeks out the basket maker.

Basketry Narratives

Many of those interviewed in the course of this project seemed to enjoy the interviewing process. They obviously relished the opportunity to talk about themselves, their families, and basket making. Kay Cothran, in her article, ¹

"Talking Trash in the Okefenoke Swamp Rim, Georgia," states that the recounting of personal experience narratives in social interaction is a traditional form of story-telling. During the interviews conducted by the students in Dr. Mon- tell's class, many of the informants told personal experience narratives as well as stories about the area, peddling, and personalities like Lijah Tom Childress. These stories reflect important information about the cultural context and significance of basket making and peddling in the Mammoth Cave area.

Stories about basket makers were almost exclusively personal experience narratives. One of the few exceptions was a story told by Stanley Cottrell that involved a church call meeting:

They was having an awful call meeting. Preacher preached a small sermon. He said, "There's something wrong. The Devil's here. Yea, the Devil's here." And he said, "I want you to all go home. Go in your closets, or go out in the woods, or go someplace and pray. And think of anything that you have done that would be contrary to the will of the Lord. And let's get this thing straightened out and get the Holy Ghost here and on the way."

So that night, they all went home. That night, . . . one old lady, she came back. She said, "Well brothers and sisters, I don't know whether I done wrong or not. But," she said, "I thought of this. . . . I made baskets and bought sugar for my two boys to make whiskey with, to sell and to get to buy seed to make a crop on." . . . Now that is absolutely true.²

Basket making, though wide-spread, was just one of


²Stanley Cottrell, 19 September 1977.
the ways that area residents brought in extra money. Other ways of bringing in money existed alongside basket making such as cutting cross-ties, selling timber rights, or making moonshine. While making moonshine was illegal, most people looked the other way. In the words of one informant:

Just everybody was trying to make a living. . . . They wouldn't turn you in. I mean, they was making a living. If you'd turn them in, . . . there'd probably be a house of little kids starved over it.1

The land between the Nolin and Green Rivers is best suited for growing timber and grazing livestock. It is suited only for occasional cultivation. Historically, most of the farmers did not fertilize or practice soil revitalization techniques such as crop rotation. Their method was to use a section of land until it wore out and then use another. According to the estimate of one informant, after the Civil War there were approximately five hundred to six hundred families living in the area on land that was already worn out.2 Most of the personal experience narratives of basket makers point out that, to them, basket making was not a recreation past-time. It was an economic reality in a difficult life. As Walter Logsdon's uncle use to say, "Basket makin and starvation go together."3

Stories about basket peddlers, especially Lijah Tom

1Lilian Meredith.
2Anderson Childress.
Childress, were more numerous. Peddlers were considered to be a little unusual. Unlike most area residents, who had never traveled farther than the county seats of Munfordville, Brownsville, and Leitchfield, peddlers traveled to far away places often leaving their wife and children at home for two or three months at a time. As a livelihood, peddling has been compared with gambling.\(^1\) Sometimes the peddler made out well, other times not so well. However, on the whole, Lijah Tom was considered to be a good liver back in his day.\(^2\) Some of the stories about peddlers, rather than stressing their economic success, point to the fact that they weren't much different from everyone else.

Life on the road was not easy. Peddlers prepared their own food, except for the evening meal, which was generally eaten at a restaurant in town. Sometimes the fare might have been a little rough, as in this story told by Thomas Fenwick about a boyhood friend who once went peddling with an older man:

He started off with him and got out on the road, and he kept saying he was hungry. Well, they finally got to this grocery and the man said, "You hold the team and I'll go get something." When he came out, he had a box of crackers and a pound of lard. The boy said, "If that's lunch, I'm heading out." He left him there and walked home.\(^3\)

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\(^1\)Anderson Childress.

\(^2\)Ibid.

\(^3\)Thomas Fenwick.
An anecdote about Lijah Tom, told by Anderson Childress, supposedly tells of Lijah's first encounter with a spittoon:

There was a lot of tales told about Lige. He was old country, didn't pretend to be sophisticated or put on any airs. He was just himself. Somebody told this story on him. He was in Illinois one night, stayed at this farm house. It was a beautiful house, furnished nice. They'd ate supper and he chewed tobacco. He went in and set by the fireplace and he took him a big chew of tobacco. Well, he set there in the chair and he'd spit towards the fireplace, like he did at home, I suppose. You know, tobacco juice all over the floor. So the lady of the house, she went and got a spittoon. She set it right in front of him and he spit in another direction. She'd get up and she'd go move it and he'd miss it again. She moved it the third or fourth time and finally he told her, "If you don't quit moving that thing lady, I'm gonna spit in it."1

Rather than a factual account, this story is a re-telling of a traditional joke. The butt of the joke is generally a country bumpkin, or cowboy, on his first trip to town. In this case, it proves the contention that Lijah Tom as just "old country."

Stories told about peddlers sometimes recount how foolish some of the buyers were. One story is about a tall tale that Lijah Tom would sometimes tell about the toy baskets he sold:

Old Childress, he'd haul baskets up there to Indiana. He'd get those little bitty baskets and folks would ask who made them. He'd say that it was little bitty kids, seven or eight years old, and they can't make them any bigger or they'd fall over,

1Anderson Childress.

2Thomas Fenwick.
Another story, this time about Nimrod Jaggers, require some explanation. Nimrod Jaggers and Lijah Tom Childress, while peddlers, never made baskets. On one occasion, however, Nimrod tried his hand at making a basket. The result was so bad that it was necessary to stretch the basket out and dry it for several months before it would stay. Peddlers would sometimes end up selling a number of baskets that were shabbily made. None of these was ever quite as bad as the basket made by Nimrod Jaggers. This story was told by Nimrod Jagger's grandson, Stanley Cottrell.

After he'd peddled baskets for a long time, he decided to make one and he made it. He made his hoops too thin and his ribs too stout, and the basket spread out... Grandpap, when he seen that he made a mistake, took it to a log barn, stuck a pole in a crack, and brought it down that way and left it there for a couple of months, until it dried out real good and then it stayed. Uncle Lige told me that it was a powerful looking basket though. These fellows was up in northern Kentucky somewhere, a wagon team selling baskets... Old man Jake Kessinger said he left this man with the wagon and said when he nearly got back, he was jumping up and hollering, "Run here Jake! I made a trade and sold the one that Nimrod made!" That was a saying back then.¹

¹Stanley Cottrell, 19 September 1977.

That peddlers sometimes sold baskets of questionable quality was commonly known. In fact, some of their methods were not exactly honest. After a period of time on the road, some of the baskets would stretch out. By leaving them uncovered while camping out at night, the morning dew would tighten the baskets back up. The peddlers would then drive
into town that morning to sell baskets. If, a few hours later, the basket stretched out again, by that time the ped­
dler was on the road to the next town.1

Peddlers had to be salesmen, not only to turn a profit, but also to keep themselves in food and supplies while on the road. Stanley Cottrell told a story about how he used a "white" lie to sell baskets while peddling.

Now we had a deaf and dumb girl that made little willow baskets. Now she was nothing but good at that. Now during the depression, right in the heart of the depres­
sion, we went for a day or two and hadn't much more than what we buy our food with. We pulled into a town, I forget the name of it, it was in Illinois. I said to Walter Cave, Walter and I was together, "Walter you watch me. Stop right here." Said Ladies Millinery Shop up over the door. I picked up a bunch of wall pockets, sewing baskets, and some little stuff. Well, I went in that shop. Bunch of ladies there, and I introduced my­
self to them, and told her . . . Now the difference in a white lie and a black lie, I told a white lie. I told them . . . I had a sister in Braille school; she's deaf and dumb. I said, "She makes these baskets and I get out every so often and sell them for her so she can com­
plete Braille school," which was a white lie. And . . . it so happened that the lady that owned the millinery shop, her husband had a deaf and dumb sister. They bought everything I had. And crying, you never heard the like, and I had to fake crying too, you know. I faked it. So I went out of that shop. I sold about two dozen of those little baskets and at a high price. I went back to the truck real fast, and Walter Cave busted out in a big laugh. Walter said, "What in the world's the matter with you?" I said, "Start that truck and get the hell out of here."

Perhaps the most famous narrative concerning the bas­
et trade is not about peddlers or basket makers, but about a one eyed mule named Kate. Most peddlers preferred to use

1Ibid.
mules, rather than horses, to pull their wagons. According to local tradition, Kate was often traded back and forth between peddlers. This poem, written by Dr. R. E. Jaggers, was printed in the Hart County News around 1910. While several informants had copies of the poem, this version was recorded by Judi Sadewasser during an interview in 1974. Mr. Walter Logsdon recited the poem from memory.

One-Eyed Kate

Sing all ye hosts beneath the sky
Of an old mule that had one eye
A color that was dazzling blue
And a pair of legs that was always true

In the year nineteen hundred and three
Beneath the spreading hickory tree
There sat at night a jockey in town
Upon his haunches on the ground

And with his knife we use to see
Him sit and barter beneath this tree
He traded in pawns and blacksmith tools
But later began to trade in mules

Now I begin to work my pate
And tell you of the life of Kate
Whose very name became renown
On the tongue of fame in this old town

It was summertime sunny eve
The jockey sat beneath the tree
Humming the air of a sacred song
When another knight came riding along

Mister raised up in the air
Saw a donkey in his rear
Ride up post be enjoy the shade
Have you a mule for trade

Quoth he I'll take the proper shade
Yea sure my donkey is for trade
With that he sat down on his heel
And very soon they made the deal
At last they left the sparkling trail
Old Kate was taken to a shed
There she did yel and spin
She also took the winter wind

This was an epic in the life of Kate
For her work was early her work was late
Though if she had sufficient food
Her trials she with all patience stood

But on some brisk blue winter day
The barn was void of corn and hay
And without these things old Kate felt blue
She always had so much to do

Next evening came old Kate was late
She was used so much in trade
That men would say before to late
Do I have to take old Kate

As time went on old Kate was made
A partner in the old famous basket trade
If I'd plow corn upon a hill
She'd taken horses to the mill

She drew the wagon where ever she went
And home across the continent
She drew the load both great and small
From the sunny side to the Niagra Fall

She'd seen the sleepy Holy Ghost
The white bears of the artic coast
She's seen Alaska's snow capped tops
And waded the shores of the Plymouth Rock

She always thought she was in luck
When she started back for ol Kentuck!
For old Hart county barns quoth she
If found is the only place fore me

Now some say I'm a fool
For saying things about this mule
Say on your words may all be true
But yet old Kate had work to do

Thirty years she's lived today
And yet if you get in her way
She'll hand you one that you can feel
With her poor ol run down shoeless heel
Although I remember the day she came
A walking through the road burr cane
I'll not see her taken away
But she'll leave this earth for sure someday

For mules like men can't live always
And he who marks her final day
A going down her life's sung
Will hear a murmur of a treat well done

Thou shall sleep in a shady nook
For no sound pierce her shady nook
Her bones will go back to the clay
Her flesh and spirit will soar away

Basket making and peddling are no longer of great
economic significance to area residents. Yet, personal ex-
perience narratives and other stories about the basket indus-
try persist. This is due, in no small part, to the fact that
these stories reflect an important emotional link with the
teller's own past, as well as that of their family and com-

Community as Social System

A community is commonly defined in terms of geograph-
ical boundaries. While locality is important, defining a
community strictly in spatial terms denies one of the most
important characteristics of any community: that a community
is primarily held together by feeling and sentiment. In de-
fining the Wax-Cub Run basket industry as a community, I am
not referring to political boundaries such as townships or
counties, but to the implicit bonds that bound the residents

the residents of the Wa.-Cub Run area involved in the basket industry together. Those bonds included common values, beliefs, and, more importantly, a mutual interdependence.¹ That interdependence is an important aspect in understanding the longevity of basket making as a traditional craft.

The series of economic depressions following the Civil War were a period of crisis for many rural communities, especially those in the South. From the beginning of settlement, tobacco had been the major cash crop of the Wa.-Cub Run area. Without price controls, the profit aspect became questionable. The price offered for tobacco often dropped so much that it could barely cover the cost of transportation to market. Even though the building of railroads during the 1870s made shipment easier, the exhorbitant shipping charges to Louisville made it a losing proposition sometimes. Mr. Walker Thompson, a life long resident of Cub Run, described how the situation affected local residents during the 1920s.

You raised tobacco in those days. I did. I shipped 1800 pounds of tobacco one time to Louisville. I got eighteen dollars for that whole 1800 pounds of tobacco, a whole summer's work. A neighbor of mine, he had a 1000 pounds. He shipped it out to Louisville and they wrote him back. They wanted him to pay for the shipping expenses. He didn't even answer the letter.²

This crisis made it absolutely necessary for area residents

²Walker Thompson.
to find new ways to bring in income.

One of the most important functions a community performs is the maintenance of a way of life. In order to accomplish that goal the community must adapt to changes in the environment through differentiation and specialization. Any such adaptive changes will reflect the cultural values of the community members. The development of a basket industry was an adaptation that helped to maintain the subsistence lifestyle of many residents with only minor alterations. That lifestyle, far from being romantic, was described by one informant in the following manner:

Well, the could have cared less about what other people thought about them. They went their own way. . . . They never had much money. They never added much to the community, in a way, they weren't in politics. They were trying to make an honorable living. There wasn't any welfare. If there had of been, they wouldn't of asked for a bit of it because they were proud people. They didn't want help. They were too involved in taking care of themselves to ask for help from anybody else. Some of them, I guess, were really poor managers. They lived sort of from hand to mouth, from one week to the next, from one Saturday to the next. Of course, their parents had lived that way and their parents before them had lived that way. . . . Their people came here, most of them, nearly all of them, when with very little work you could live. All they had to do was raise a patch of corn for their bread and they chiefly depended on hunting for their meat. They could run their hogs outside, there wasn't any stock law until about 1912, and all the animals would run outside. The hogs fattened themselves on nuts in the forest, beechnuts and chestnuts, so these people were trying to leave, I guess, like their forebears lived. . . . They didn't like change. . . . I guess the majority of the poor people didn't even care about sending their children to school. . . . That was their attitude. It began to change after the turn of the twentieth century.¹

¹Anonymous.
Basket making most probably meant the difference between being able to stay in the area or having to leave and find work in industrial centers such as Louisville or Indianapolis. Even today, one of the most obvious cultural values among residents of the area is the desire to stay in the area, often on the ancestral farm. Over ninety percent of the residents of Hart, Edmonson, and Grayson Counties are natives of those counties.\(^1\) To this day, many people continue to have hard feelings toward Mammoth Cave Park and the Army Corps of Engineers for removing them from their homes.

The development of a basket industry based on an abundant natural resource allowed many residents to, in effect, specialize in basket making. While most people made baskets and only a few owned stores, the marketing potential gave both an opportunity to make additional money. A few exceptional men, like Lijah Tom Childress and Nimrod Jaggers, became entrepreneurs and specialized in the peddling and marketing of baskets.

The basket industry obviously reflected local values. Informally organized and family based, this system remained in tact until the pressures of the 1930s and the 1940s made the subsistence lifestyle of local residents a no longer viable economic option. From its beginnings, the basket industry was remarkably flexible and willing to adapt. The will-

ingness of the peddlers, especially the long distance ped-
dlers, continually provided additional markets. The develop-
ment of roadside basket stands, at a time when the farm mar-
et was decreasing, was another adaptation that provided
a smaller but still ready market. It is also the opinion
of several informants that baskets such as the flower basket,
the wall basket, and the toy basket were not initially trad-
tional forms but were made in response to a growing non-
farming market. The result was that even though basket mak-
ing declined after 1940, due to full time jobs and a growing
migration of people leaving, it did not completely disappear.

Today, a renewed interest in handmade craft objects,
combined with the relative scarcity of basket makers, has
created a seller's market. The demand is far greater than
the basket makers can supply. Baskets are no longer peddled
or traded to local stores. Most craftspeople prefer to sell
their baskets themselves, or directly to souvenir shops.
The system is more informal than in days past, since basket
making no longer means the difference between having or not
having many necessities. Most basket makers state this dif-
terence when they say that they now make baskets as a hobby. Not that they do not use or enjoy the extra money earned, but
that money is no longer the determinant factor.

1Anderson Childress; and Rec Childress.
2Walter Logsdon, 27 June 1974; and Stanley Cottrell
14 September 1977.
The family is no longer as important a part of basket making as it once was. Full fledged family assembly lines are a thing of the past. Some of the older basket makers interviewed expressed frustration at the fact that their children showed little or no inclination to make baskets, even if they knew how. The truth of the matter is that both the family and the community are no longer part of a subsistence subculture whose existence is predicated on farming and basket making. The diversification of the area's economic base since the 1930s is reflected in the area's culture. Options now available to local residents as far as education, housing, and employment would not have been possible fifty years ago.

The maintenance of the group, especially the family, as the dominant goal has given way, partly, to the goal of individual success within a larger social system. In order to understand the ramifications of this change in goal orientation on basket making as a traditional craft, it is necessary to examine the importance of a change in the aesthetic perception of basket making and the symbiotic relationship between basket making and the family in the past.
CHAPTER IV

GROWING UP AMONG THE SHAVINGS

Family and Individual Perspectives of the Basket Industry

The family is an extremely complex social phenomenon. This primary unit of human interaction has been studied by a wide range of academic disciplines including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and folklore. With all of the academic and clinical research that has been done, it is clearly obvious that the family is a potent cultural force in the formative years of childhood. Most children learn to talk, work, and play within a family context, as well as many other complex behaviors. To investigate, much less describe, all of the aspects of family life affecting the learning of a traditional craft such as basket making would be a difficult, if not impossible, task. In this chapter, I will attempt to describe how the process of socialization and a particular aspect called modeling were important factors in how children from the Wax-Cub Run community learned to make baskets, what roles they assumed in the basketry process when they became adults, and in understanding why some people in the area continue to make baskets today.

In subsistence farming communities, like Wax-Cub Run,
there is a strong emphasis on work, thrift, and an orientation toward the family. Success in such a system is defined not by the success of the individual but by the ability of the family to stay together as a social and economic unit. Therefore, the family has the prime responsibility for the rearing and educating of children. One of the most important and formative processes that children undergo is that of socialization. Socialization, for the purposes of this discussion, means the learning, or acquiring, of integrative behavior within the family. In other words, the manner in which a child learns how the others in the family expect him to behave and how the child comes to feel this is both the right and the desirable way to act.¹

An extremely important part of socialization is called modeling. Modeling is a kind of imitation, a process by which children and adolescents try out a behavior, activity, or role exhibited by someone generally older. If the modeling behavior is considered to be appropriate, it is often rewarded. If the behavior is thought to be inappropriate, it is sometimes ignored but most often punished by parents. Occasionally, especially with adolescents, a modeled behavior provides its own reward and does not require praise or condemnation from an authority figure. Needless to say, the

kinds of behaviors, activities, and roles exhibited by older members of the family, especially parents, have a profound affect on the child.

Basket making in the Wax-Cub Run community was predominantly a family activity. When the family had no children, or the children were too small to assist, the husband and wife often made baskets together to bring in additional income. In the situation where only the husband knew how to make baskets, the wife generally learned from her husband. In instances where the wife knew how to make baskets, and the husband did not, the husband at least learned how to gather timber if he did not learn to make baskets entirely. In many cases, both parents had learned the craft when they were children from their respective families.

The exposure of young children to a traditional craft as part of family life could result in early examples of modeling behavior, even when the child is not yet ready to take an active part. A personal recollection of such behavior was related by Susette Barret, whose father made baskets.

When we were small and all the other kids were in school, I would play in the shaving while Dad was making baskets and I would try to make little baskets with him.¹

In Susette Barret's case, such modeling activity prepared her for a more active role she would soon acquire.

Children generally began to take an active role in

¹Susette Barret.
in the family basket making process between ages six and twelve. Amazingly, they almost all seemed to have learned the procedure in a relatively similar fashion. The children began by learning the easiest skill first, how to weave the final splits into the baskets. Once that had been mastered, the children learned how to trim and dress rough splits for weaving. The next step involved learning how to make ribs and how to frame them into the basket. Finally, the child learned how to make and prepare the basket hoops, the most arduous task.

This seemingly backward method of learning is actually extremely effective. It permits the child to learn a complex series of gross and fine motor skills in an ascending order from the easiest to the most difficult. At the same time, it permits the child to refer from the whole to the parts. Behavioral psychologists refer to this kind of procedure as backward chaining. They have found it to be one of the most effective ways to teach a child complex manual skills.¹

In order to take full advantage of the difference in the skill levels of children, families made baskets in a sort of informal assembly line. Many of the families were quite large by today's standard. A family with eight (or more) children was not considered to be unusual. Younger children

¹Dr. Carolyn and Dr. Richard Fox, interviewed by Denis Kiely, Columbia, Maryland, 10 March 1979.
would do the final weaving. Older children would help prepare splits and finish the ribbing. The parents and the eldest children, if the children were skilled enough, would prepare the timber and begin the framing process. The child thus moved up an escalating ladder of responsibility, within the family operation, commiserate with their age and skill level. A child learning basket making in this manner would, by nature, have to exhibit a number of modeling behaviors. As each new step was learned, it would be necessary for the child to imitate, or model, each new skill being shown to him by a parent or older sibling.

Erik H. Erikson, the noted Danish psychoanalyst, states that middle childhood, roughly ages six through twelve, is an extremely important period in a child's development. According to Erikson, middle childhood is a time when self-esteem develops through industry and activity. By the age of six, most children have already developed a wide range of gross motor skills. It is during the middle childhood years that a substantial growth in fine motor skills occur. In Erikson's theory, the self-esteem of the child grows as the child demonstrates competency and skill in a variety of activities. A child receiving acknowledgement from his family for learning a complex task, such as basket making, during this period could be profoundly influenced.¹

Once all the prerequisite skills had been learned, the child had the option to make baskets on his/her own, in addition to baskets made with the family. In this way, the child or adolescent could go to the local store to purchase personal items on his/her own. Stanley Cottrell remembers making baskets as a teenager so that he could buy cigarette tobacco for himself and chewing gum for his female acquaintances. With the lack of currency and jobs in the area, this was one of the few ways young persons could earn enough money to purchase things that they wanted.

In Howard W. Marshall's otherwise outstanding article, "Mr. Westfall's Baskets," Marshall comments on what he interprets as the essential masculinity of basket making:

Westfall has never doubted the essential masculinity of basket making. He knows the work to be very strenuous involving considerable expenditure of physical strength as well as requiring manual dexterity. Other types of folk baskets are commonly made by women, but a Westfall basket could be made start-to-finish only by an exceptional woman. Westfall's sister can weave the splits, and Mrs. Westfall has woven a basket or two, but few women could perform the rudimentary but critical task of selecting, felling, and transportation of the oak tree to the work area, the splitting out of sticks of timber, and the riving of the larger splits. Moreover, the old ribbing operation requires enormous effort and strength to pull the rib stock through the iron ribber. People accustomed to the popular scene of Indian women weaving straw baskets or of the the ladies' home companion basket weaving kits have little notion of how laborious the making of a basket is when done according to the methods like that of Westfall.

1Stanley Cottrell, 14 September 1977.
Such an assertion is not born out by the recollections of Wax-Cub Run residents. It is interesting to note that while there was substantial division of labor according to sexual roles in the area, basket making was practiced extensively by both men and women. Lilian Meredith stated that it was a common practice for her mother to take her and the other children out to select timber. Once the proper tree had been found, her mother would cut it down and split the wood into sizes small enough for the children to carry home.\(^1\) Rec Childress remembered that during a period when good timber was scarce, both his mother and his father would take a wagon and look for timber in the surrounding area.\(^2\)

While division of labor by sex, such as cutting and preparing timber, was practiced by some families, the roles changed from family to family and were not the absolute domain of the male members.

The making of the hoops, especially for the bushel basket, is a task that requires a good measure of strength. Contrary to Marshall's opinion, it is a task that many women were capable of, at least in the Wax-Cub Run area. In fact, it is generally conceded by area residents that while the men might have been a little better at the bushel basket, due to strength, women were generally considered superior at mak-

\(^1\) Lilain Meredith.

\(^2\) Rector Childress.
ing the smaller sizeu baskets. The iron ribber described by Marshall was apparently never used in the Wax-Cub Run area. The standard method of preparing ribs was to whittle them from larger pieces of white oak and was practiced by both men and women. Marshall's contention that white oak ribbed basket making is a predominately masculine activity points to a not uncommon problem in folklife scholarship. While basket making may have been a more masculine activity in Mr. Westfall's family, to make a generalization from such a limited sample can lead to errors. In doing ethnographic studies of one person, or family, folklorists must always be careful not to interpret bias or personal experience as common fact.

The basket making families of the Wax-Cub Run area were composed of one parental dyad (husband and wife) and their offspring. If one of the parents died, quite often the surviving parent re-married. The concept of family, however, did not end with the nuclear family. Almost all of these basket making families were interrelated over several generations. In attempting to do a few family genealogies, it was not unusual to come across situations such as half-brothers who were uncles, second wives that were nieces of first wives, as well as other relations that were a little more difficult to figure out. Families in the area can be thought of as extended families as well, though not quite the same as the extended families of European peasantry. An old-
der member of the extended family sometimes provided a role model for a younger family member.

While stores and roadside stands were sometimes operated by women, all of the informants agreed that peddling baskets was an exclusively male role. Besides the comment by one informant, "That it wouldn't of been quite right," it is most probable that women were never invited to take part in a peddling operation.\(^1\) Experienced peddlers generally had younger men, many of whom were related, go with them. It was in this fashion that most younger men became interested in peddling. Lijah Tom Childress accompanied Nimrod Jaggers, to whom he was related by marriage, and his uncle, Benjamin Childress, before he ever peddled baskets on his own. Lijah Tom, in turn, took a number of his brothers, sons, and other relatives along with him on different trips. Among those relatives that accompanied Lijah Tom were Felix Childress, Bob Childress, Sim Childress (his brothers), Stamper Gunterman, William Gunterman (his nephews), Rec Childress, George Childress (his sons), and Stanley Cottrell.\(^2\) Stanley was not really related to Lijah Tom but he was Nimrod Jaggers grandson. All of these men eventually became part-time peddlers in their own right and took others out on the road with them as well.

In an area where jobs were fairly scarce, peddling offered an economic opportunity, as well as a chance for ad-

\(^1\)Thomas Fenwick.

\(^2\)Anderson Childress; and Stanley Cottrell, 14 September 1977.
venture. Peddlers like Lijah Tom Childress might have been seen as eccentric by some, but to the young men of the area an opportunity to travel with a peddler must have been cause for excitement. The stories that the peddlers, and those that accompanied them, told of different places and people made them into romantic characters, of a sort. Otherwise, why would stories about Lijah Tom continue to be told almost forty years after his death? In an area that offered few opportunities for individual success, Lijah Tom Childress was a powerful role model for young men eager to try their hand at something other than farming.

Peddling of baskets was obviously an indication that change was coming to the families along the Nolin and Green Rivers. The same roads and railroads that made peddling possible would also bring other, more significant changes. By the late 1930s, the changes were so great that regular peddling became a thing of the past. These same changes forever altered the style of family life for most residents. People began to leave the farm for jobs elsewhere, especially during the Second World War. Most of these jobs were in industrial centers such as Louisville, Indianapolis, and Detroit. While some left for a few years and then returned, many individuals and families would return only to visit.

Following the Second World War, the regional economic base also expanded to some degree and provided new jobs. It is interesting to note that, even today, in the local
parlance any job not considered farm work is referred to as public work, whether the job is with local government or private industry. Such jobs removed the necessity of relying on farming for income.

The fabric of family life had obviously begun to change as well. Parents had trained their children to assume their role in a basically subsistence lifestyle. In the words of anthropologist Margaret Mead,

After World War Two, when the assumptions of shared experience between parents and their children could no longer be made, the parents could no longer provide models for the future, nor could they expect their children ever to follow in their footsteps. 1

A few families continued to make baskets in an assembly line fashion; but after a few years, in many cases, it was only the husband and wife.

George Childress was one basket maker who continued the family tradition. Today, his children are grown with children of their own. His daughter, Susette Barret, commented on the dwindling interest in basket making among the younger members of the family.

I've noticed in the past few years, . . . there's just one or two, maybe, in the family that's even picking it up and carrying on, like Daddy. You know, all of his brothers and sisters can do this. They can, every one, make baskets and weave, even his four sisters. There's nine of them in all, and every one of them can make baskets. . . . Well now, like in Dad's family, . . . out of all of us, there's four girls and two boys. Two boys are the only one that does the baskets. . . . And then, 1

1 Margaret Mead, Culture and Commitment, (Garden City, N.Y.: Natural History Press, 1970), p. 78.
In my uncle's family, none of the children have carried it on. In a community that now has a stronger emphasis on education and individual success, basket making no longer offers a significant work identity to most people.

Over a period of time, changes in the social environment eroded away the family base of the basket industry. Many individuals who knew how to make baskets no longer found the time, or the interest, to continue. Yet, some individuals did. In order to understand the reasons why certain individuals have continued this tradition, despite changes in the social system, it is necessary to examine some important aspects of aesthetics and its relationship to basket making.

1Susette Barret.
CHAPTER V

THE LOVING OF THE GAME

A Phenomenological Approach to Aesthetics

A socially and economically important basket industry existed in the poor hill country of the Mammoth Cave area from around 1880 til the Second World War. It was a family craft industry that was successful due to a variety of long distance marketing techniques. The peddling of baskets by wagon, train, and trucks, as well as parcel post sales, eventually gave way to a basically tourist market along local highways. That market provides an outlet for those basket makers that are still active, along with a few younger individuals who have learned the craft.

Along the way, the ribbed basket has been dyed, shrunk, and cut in half upon occasion. Many basket makers have produced a wide variety of different style white oak baskets as well including clothes baskets, lunch baskets with lids, and ever flower vases. One of the most interesting basket encountered during field work was one made by George Childress. Resembling, to some degree, a wall basket, this basket has a cross woven of white oak that rises over two feet above the rim of the basket. Looking something like a
Religious icon, this basket illustrates the changing function of basketry in the Mammoth Cave area. Once a common farm implement, the white oak ribbed basket has become, at least partly, more of an aesthetic object.

Traditional approaches to material culture have been based upon breaking a material object down into its components. Analysis consists of an examination of form, construc-
Aesthetic analysis, in particular deals with form. Because typology and cross cultural analysis are based upon form, aesthetic analysis consists of taking an object's form and separating it into primary characteristics (type) and secondary characteristics (style). Form is considered aesthetically important because it is persistent and is the least changing of an object's components.¹

The methodological approach of breeding a material object into categories such as form, construction, and use is informative and useful. Certainly works have a basic structure. However, we are only kidding ourselves when we believe that this sort of methodological approach can provide us with aesthetic understanding. This, I think, is one of the main reasons that folklorists have difficulty understanding craftspeople when we ask questions about aesthetics or the "feel" of a particular process. Aesthetic pleasure is not contained merely within the form. When an object, such as a white oak basket, is created, there is a transformation in the raw materials. In the act of creation, the raw materials are transformed into something more than form, something more than the sum total of its parts. The true understanding of such an object is possible only when it is perceived as part of a realtional whole, as part of a system that, to a great

extent, may be non-verbal.\(^1\)

An ax or knife cannot store energy, and alone cannot be thought of as a system. Picking up the ax, however, man becomes part of a system.

This leads to all sorts of personifications, anthropomorphizations of tools, plants, animals, fertility of fields, etc. . . . All these so-called projections are derived from the intuitive observation that in our involvement with these things that we are not alone. We are not subject, these others object but somehow we involved in a dialogue and a great deal of this dialogue, this communication, may not be verbal or cognative.\(^2\)

Primary process has proposed, in some cultures, the in-dwelling spirit as a metaphor for what is felt as real kinship between human and tree. The unconscious, in the language of aesthetics or religion, can propose an emotional response, such as love, as a proper relationship to the other, even though it may be perceived by the conscious mind as an inanimate object.

In folklife scholarship, the basic nature of craft is often conceived of as the transformation of raw materials into useful and handsome objects by a logical comprehensive process. Art, on the other hand, is seen as the transformation of amorphous, malleable, material not into a useful object but into a symbolic one which conveys and expresses


experience. While this conception of art and craft points out many of the important differences between art and craft, it may be that it glosses over some important emotional similarities involved in the act of creating. The very concepts of art and craft are so emotionally loaded that when we attempt to talk about them, we often end up in a muddle.

Robert Plant Armstrong's concept of the affecting presence, which is used effectively in Gerald Davis' article on Afro-American coil basketry, provides a very useful way around this muddle and argues for an approach that includes not only the created object, but also the cultural systems that support it.

Affecting things and events are those cultural objects and happenings resulting from human actions directed towards producing them rather than anything else, which is to say that they are not accidental. These objects and happenings in any given culture are accepted by those native to that culture as being purposefully concerned with potency, emotions, values, and states of being or experience—all, in a clear sense, powers. ... They are regarded by those co-cultural with them ... as being in and of the real world, however constituted, including the mythical.1

In the course of this chapter, I will attempt to give an example of how phenomenological thought, in particular that of Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer, lends itself to the

aesthetic analysis of basket making in the Mammoth Cave area and to the understanding of its affective nature.

Martin Heidegger, in his seminal work *Being and Time*, sought a method of understanding Western conceptions of being. Understanding is a special term to Heidegger. It is not conceived as something to be possessed but rather it is a constituent element of being-in-the-world. Understanding is thus fundamental and prior to almost every act of existing. An important characteristic of understanding, to Heidegger, is that it operates within a set of already interpreted relationships, a relational whole. Understanding is ontological.

I will attempt to present this in a more concrete example. When we walk into a room, we do not need to re-think such concepts as table or chair. Rather, we understand how these things work and what their relationships are. It is not necessary for us to think of those things that make a chair a chair, or a table a table. We see them, their functions, their interrelationships immediately. We understand them. More importantly, we understand them not as individual elements that have been experienced and remembered, but we understand them within a total structure. This relational whole is crucial to understanding Heidegger's concept of world.

World, to Heidegger, does not mean our environment.

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It is not the world that can be measured and understood by scientific analysis. It is closer to what could be considered as our personal world view. To conceive of the world as separate from the self is totally antithetical to Heidegger's conception. World is prior to any separation of self and world in the objective sense.\(^1\) It is prior to objectivity and subjectivity. It is impossible to describe the world by trying to enumerate or name all the entities within it because the world is presupposed in every act of knowing even a single entity. The things which are present in man's physical world are not the world, but rather, they are in a world. Only man has world.\(^2\) Unnoticed, presupposed, encompassing, world is always present. It is fundamental to all understanding.

Corresponding to the unobtrusiveness of the world is the unobtrusiveness of certain entities in the world to which one daily relates his existing. Heidegger names these entities tools. Tools are those entities that man uses to define, order, and give purpose to the world. Almost anything can be a tool. Tools do not occur singly. They always refer to other equipment, other tools. Tools come together in an interrelated network. When a tool is used in an activity, it directly refers to the purpose of the activity. The purpose of a singular activity is actually a sub-purpose, which is

\(^1\)Ibid, p. 34.
\(^2\)Ibid, p. 38.
decided by a general purpose. Within this framework, man has a personal choice of purpose, what activities will achieve the purpose, and what tools will be utilized to achieve the purpose. Because of this personal choice, which man creates for himself, man creates his own world.¹

Tools are used daily, and like movements of the body performed without thought, they become transparent. Only when some breakdown occurs are they noticed.² When this breakdown occurs, tools begin a transformation to what Heidegger terms objects. Objects are those tools which no longer function. Objects are the degenerative products of tools. The transition of a tool into an object is a transition from meaningfulness and purposefulness to non-meaning and non-purpose.

At the point of breakdown, we may observe a significant fact: the meaning of these entities lies in the relation to a structural whole of interrelated meanings and intentions. In breakdown, for a brief moment, the meaning of the entities and their interrelation are lit up emerging directly from the world.³ In Being and Time, Heidegger points out the vast difference between the mere intellectual comprehension of a hammer and understanding a hammer. A hammer can be weighed, photographed, documented, and compared to

¹Ibid, p. 60.
²Ibid, p. 64.
³Palmer, p. 6.
other hammers. However, a broken hammer at once shows what
a hammer is.¹ This suggests a phenomenological principal.
Being can never be disclosed to analytic deductive investiga­
tions because world and being are too shot through with mean­
ing. They are beyond socio-historical-linguistic analyses.
World and being are beyond such methodological knowledge.

Basket making has existed in the Mammoth Cave area for
over four generations. However, in the late 1930s and with
the beginning of the Second World War, a distinct change in
the basket industry occurred. This change was brought about
by a number of reasons; but a breakdown, as Martin Heidegen
describes it, did occur. Certainly, many people continued to
make baskets but many others ceased to make baskets entirely,
or would not return to making baskets for many years. There
occurred a distinct transition, within some people's world
view, of baskets as a functional tool to a non-functional ob­
ject, from meaning to non-meaning. Corresponding with this
breakdown of baskets as tool, was a larger breakdown in world
view as a whole. For others, however, baskets went through a
different kind of transition. Not from a tool into an object,
but from one sort of tool into another, from one form of mean­
ing into another.

At the time this project began, several of the basket
makers interviewed had just returned to basket making after

¹W. B. Macomber, The Anatomy of Disillusion (Evanston
long periods of not making baskets. They all insisted that there was something different concerning the baskets that they had made recently. Nearly all of these people insisted that they had returned to basket making as a hobby; but there was something more, something deeper and more significant. They were still craftspeople with a superb eye and feel for their craft. To them, baskets and especially basket making did not cease to be functional. To them, basket making was an important expression of creativity. In the words of one informant,

I mean the way they're made, not the style. You could copy the style, I guess some of them could in any version of the basket. But, I mean the art, the way my Dad makes it, puts it together and frames it is what I mean.¹

So often, tortured distinctions were made between form and content. When these distinctions occur, creativity no longer has a clear place in the world. Creativity is divorced from the world from which it came and the creator is left somewhere, out in some kind of void. Besides, such distinctions ignore a basic fact about creativity. Creation springs from an abundance. Whether it is a folktale, a legend, a novel, or a craft object, creation (the act of creating) comes from an excess of power, a surplus of being. When we truly experience an affecting object, we are not gaping in hedonistic pleasure at mere surface forms. As soon as we stop viewing affecting presences as objects and start seeing them as reflective of

¹Susette Barret.
the world, then we can realize that affecting objects are more than mere sense perceptions but a presentation of world, and of being.

Creativity should be seen as a kind of game,¹ not unlike the games of children yet with a basic similarity. Games have a kind of holy seriousness about them. If individuals do not follow the rules, do not take the game seriously, the game is spoiled.² Game is a free activity which one can enter of one's own free will. Yet, while it is being played, the game is master. The fascination of the game casts a spell over the players and draws them into it; a form of ritual, it is truly master over the players. Art or craft can be a ritual that has its own special spirit. The creator chooses what he will devote himself to; but once he chooses, the special game of creation has its own momentum. It pushes itself forward; it wills to be played out. Creativity is not a static thing but a dynamic force.

Many of the basket makers who have recently become active again made their first baskets for spouses that had not grown up in basket making families. They also made baskets for their children and grandchildren. It is not very difficult to notice the power or the immediacy with which their actions speak. What they are trying to do is to pass on what-

²Ibid, p. 100.
thing more than the simple form of a basket. They are trying to pass on the art, the way of life, and the world out of which both they and their baskets come.
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