

Archives
closed
LD
175
A40k
Th
262
1998

APPALACHIAN WILLOW WORK:
RE-ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF PLACE
AND DEVELOPING CONCEPTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

A Thesis

by

CHARLENE GAY TRESTAIN

Submitted to the Graduate School

Appalachian State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

July 1998

Major Department: Art

LIBRARY
APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY
BOONE, NORTH CAROLINA 28608

APPALACHIAN WILLOW WORK:
RE-ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF PLACE
AND DEVELOPING CONCEPTS OF SUSTAINABILITY


A Thesis

by

Charlene Gay Trestain

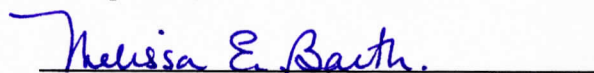
July 1998

APPROVED BY:



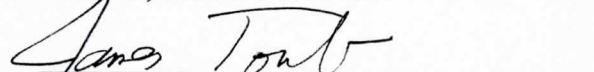
Gayle Weitz

Chairperson, Thesis Committee



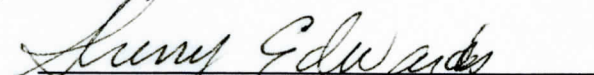
Melissa Barth

Member, Thesis Committee



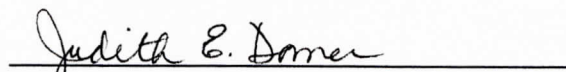
James Toub

Member, Thesis Committee



Sherry Edwards

Chairperson, Art Department



Judith E. Domer

Dean of Graduate Studies and Research

ABSTRACT

APPALACHIAN WILLOW WORK:

RE-ESTABLISHING A SENSE OF PLACE

AND DEVELOPING CONCEPTS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Charlene Gay Trestain, B.F.A., Eastern Michigan University

M.A., Appalachian State University

Thesis Chairperson: Gayle Marie Weitz

Willow work is an ancient traditional art form found in many different places throughout the world (Verdet-Fierz, 1993) including the Appalachian region (Stephenson, 1977). In this thesis the antecedents and contemporary practice of Appalachian willow work was investigated as it relates to developing concepts of sustainability and the re-establishment of a sense of place in postmodern culture. The interdependent relationships between the material (willow), the place (Appalachia), and the artisan were examined. Appalachian willow work exemplifies the interdependent nature of all life forms on earth that we must come to understand if humankind is to survive into the twenty-first century.

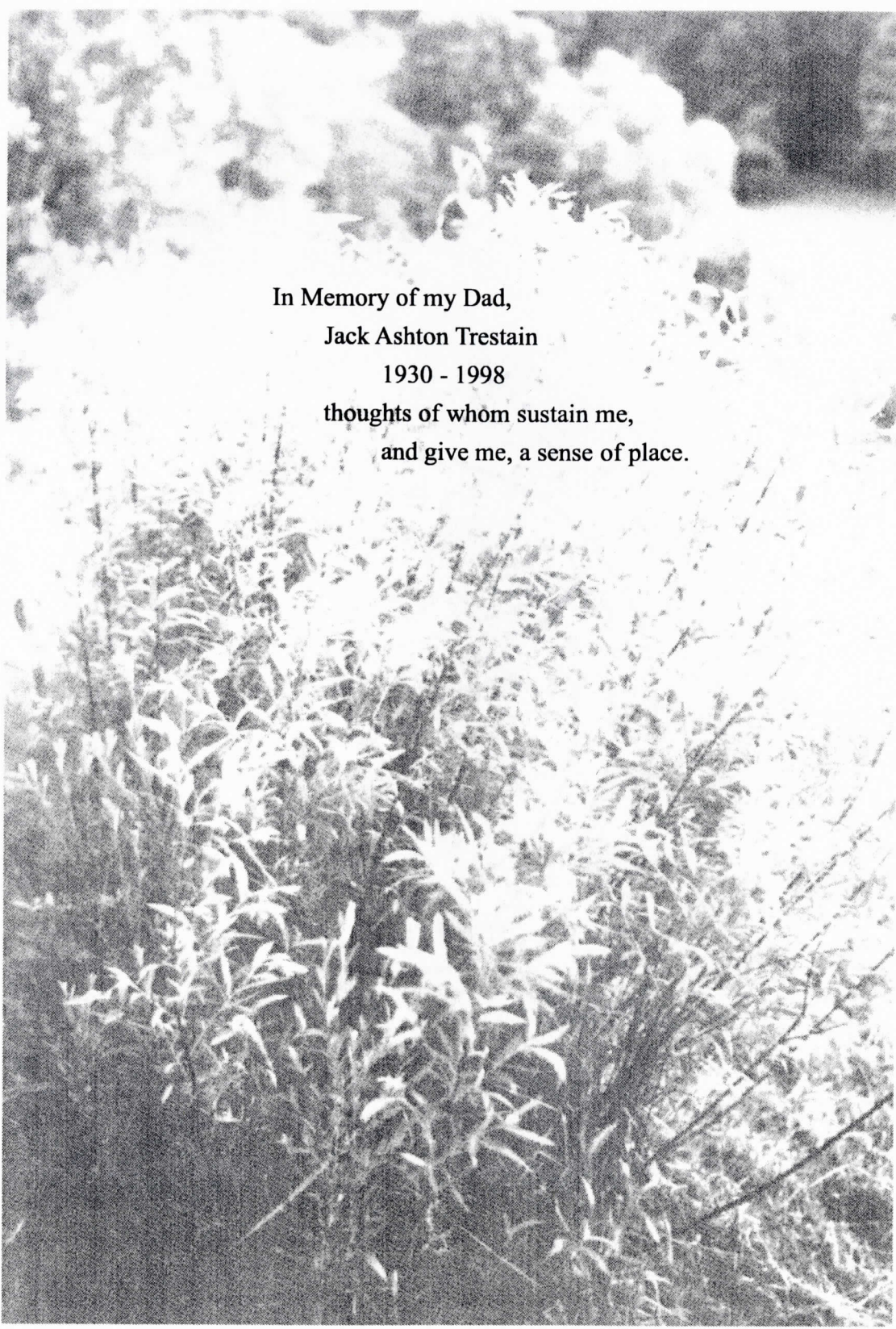
The ecological crisis is at hand (Brown, 1997). As educators we must educate for an ecologically sustainable culture (Bowers, 1995). Concepts of sustainability and the re-establishment of a sense of place as illustrated in Appalachian willow work, are essential components of a curriculum in which goals are aimed at ecological sustainability.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis committee members for their guidance throughout this project. I thank my graduate committee chairperson, Dr. Gayle Weitz, for spurring me forward with encouragement, consistency and clarity. Thanks also extend to thesis committee members Dr. James Toub, whose insightful comments challenge and educate, and Dr. Melissa Barth for encouragement and editorial assistance.

Thanks are also extended to others including: Dr. Phyllis Crain and the Avery County Board of Education for granting me educational leave in order to achieve this goal; Herman and Nona Noblitt, for sharing their life, work and knowledge of Gypsy willow; Bonnie Gale, for sharing her work and knowledge of traditional English willow basketry; Beth and Sandra at Appalachian State University Media Services for computer scanning and printing assistance; Dot and Rosa for friendship, encouragement and help with the little one; and Mom and Bobbie-Jo for faithful encouragement. I would also like to thank Dr. Melissa Barth and Vice Chancellor Harvey Durham for affording me the opportunity to make it all happen.

Last and most importantly, I would like to thank my husband Dennis Scanlin and our daughter Maura Shawn, for love, comfort and compassion as the year was long and the year was hard.



In Memory of my Dad,
Jack Ashton Trestain
1930 - 1998
thoughts of whom sustain me,
and give me, a sense of place.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
List of Figures	viii
Chapter	
1. Introduction	1
2. Defining Appalachian Willow Work	8
Willow	9
The Appalachian region	15
Appalachian willow work	21
3. Cultural and Historical Traditions in Appalachia Willow Work	33
English	33
Irish	36
Scotch	41
German	44
Gypsy	49
Rustic	52
Revival	53
4. Sustaining Traditions in Contemporary Appalachian Willow Work	59
Nona and Herman Noblitt	60
Bonnie Gale	70
5. Conclusions and Implications for Art Education	76

List of References

84

Vita

88

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Spring willow. Photograph by the author.	11
Figure 2. Map, Appalachia. <i>Appalachia: a Regional Geography Land, People, and Development</i> (p. 10), Karl B. Raitz, Richard Ulack and Thomas R. Leinbach, 1984, Boulder: Westview Press.	16
Figure 3. Map, John C. Campbell. <i>The Southern Highlander and His Homeland</i> (xxxiii), John C. Campbell, 1969, Lexington, KY: The University of Kentucky Press.	17
Figure 4. Map, A. R. C. <i>Appalachia: a Regional Geography, Land, People and Development</i> (p. 25), Karl B. Raitz, Richard Ulack and Thomas R. Leinbach, 1984, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.	19
Figure 5. Map, Routeways. <i>Appalachia: a Regional Geography, Land, People and Development</i> (p. 96), Karl B. Raitz, Richard Ulack and Thomas R. Leinbach, 1984, Boulder, CO: Westview Press.	20
Figure 6. Birch bark basket. <i>Indian Baskets</i> (p. 18), Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.	22
Figure 7. Woodsplint basket. (Peabody Museum, Harvard University, photographed by Hillel Burger, 39-36-10/18415. <i>Indian Baskets</i> (p. 115), by Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.	22

- Figure 8. Twill plaited basketry. 22
Indian Baskets (p. 107), Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 9. Appalachian willow work. 24
Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia (p. 84), John Rice Irwin, 1982, Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 10. Appalachian willow work. 24
Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia (p. 85), John Rice Irwin, 1982, Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 11. Appalachian willow work. 25
Basketry of the Appalachian Mountains (p. 95), Sue Stephenson, 1977, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Figure 12. Appalachian willow work. 25
Appalachian White Oak Basket Making, Handing Down the Basket (Cl. Pl. 19), Rachael Nash Laws and Cynthia Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 13. Willow traditions in Native American basketry. 26
Indian Baskets (p. 19), Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 14. Willow traditions in oak. 26
Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia (p. 44), John Rice Irwin, 1982, Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 15. Willow traditions in honeysuckle. 26
Baskets and Basket Makers in Southern Appalachia (p. 93), John Rice Irwin, 1982, Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 16. Coiled. 27
Indian Baskets (p. 105), Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Figure 17. Twined. 27
Indian Baskets (p. 121), Sarah Peabody Turnbaugh and William Turnbaugh, 1986, West Chester, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.

- Figure 18. Joinery, lap. 28
Making Twig Furniture and Household Things (p. 43),
 Abby Ruff, 1991, Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks.
- Figure 19. Joinery, overlap. 28
Making Twig Furniture and Household Things (p. 42),
 Abby Ruoff, 1991, Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks.
- Figure 20. Joinery, butt. 28
Making Twig Furniture and Household Things (p. 42),
 Abby Ruff, 1991, Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks.
- Figure 21. Rustication and mosaic work. 28
Rustic Traditions (p. 75), Ralph Kylloe, 1993, Salt Lake
 City, UT: Gibbs-Smith.
- Figure 22. Gypsy, rustic traditions. 31
Rustic Traditions (p. 113), Ralph Kylloe, 1993, Salt Lake
 City, UT: Gibbs-Smith.
- Figure 23. Revival traditions. 32
 Folk Art Center, permanent collection #1988.79, c1920,
 Asheville, NC.
- Figure 24. English willow work. 35
The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry (p. 43),
 Dorothy Wright, 1983, London: David and Charles,
 Newton and Abbot.
- Figure 25. English Madeira border. 37
The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry (p. 37),
 Dorothy Wright, 1983, London: David and Charles,
 Newton and Abbot.
- Figure 26. Madeira border in Appalachian oak. 37
*Appalachian White Oak Basket making, Handing Down
 The Basket* (Cl. Pl. 20), Rachael Nash Law and Cynthia
 Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.

- Figure 27. Creel, British Isles. 40
The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry (p. 163),
 Dorothy Wright, 1977, London: David and Charles,
 Newton Abbot.
- Figure 28. Creel, Irish. 40
Ireland's Traditional Crafts (p. 124), Anne O'Dowd in
 David Shaw-Smith's, 1986, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Figure 29. Creel and pigeon basket. 40
Willow, Oak and Rye (p. 47), Jeanette Lasansky, 1978,
 University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Figure 30. Irish potato sciob. 40
Ireland's Traditional Crafts (p. 121), Anne O'Dowd in
 David Shaw-Smith's, 1986, London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Figure 31. Appalachian sciob. 42
*Appalachian White Oak Basket Making: Handing Down the
 Basket* (p. 117), Rachael Nash Law and Cynthia Taylor, 1991,
 Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 32. Appalachian sciob. 42
 (Courtesy of the Mercer Museum, Bucks County Historical
 Society). *Appalachian White Oak Basket making, Handing
 Down the Basket* (p. 89), Rachael Nash Law and Cynthia
 Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 33. Timber and wicker. 43
Irish Country Furniture 1700-1950 (p. 186), Claudia Kinmonth,
 1993, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Figure 34. Traditional hen basket. 43
The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry (p. 119), Dorothy
 Wright, 1983, London: David and Charles, Newton and Abbot.
- Figure 35. Appalachian hen basket. 45
Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands (p. 213), Allen Eaton,
 1973, New York: Dover.

- Figure 36. Cherokee hen basket. 45
Appalachian White Oak Basket Making: Handing Down the Basket (p. 120), Rachael Nash Law and Cynthia Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 37. Scottish crealagh. 46
The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry (p. 123), Dorothy Wright, 1983, London: David and Charles, Newton and Abbot.
- Figure 38. Appalachian crealagh. 46
Appalachian White Oak Basket Making: Handing Down the Basket (p. 120), Rachael Nash Law and Cynthia Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 39. German oak rod basket. 48
Appalachian White Oak Basket Making: Handing Down the Basket (Cl. Pl. 21), Rachel Nash Law and Cynthia Taylor, 1991, Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Figure 40. German oak rod baskets. 48
Willow, Oak and Rye (p. 24), Jeanette Lasansky, 1978, University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Figure 41. Gypsy willow. 51
Rustic Traditions (p. 121), Ralph Kylloe, 1993, Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith.
- Figure 42. Revival willow work. 55
Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands (P. 206), Allen Eaton, 1973, New York: Dover.
- Figure 43. Aunt cord Ritchie. 56
 Photograph by Doris Ulmann, Doris Ulmann Foundation, Berea College, Berea, Kentucky. *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands* (p. 110), Allen Eaton, 1973, New York: Dover.
- Figure 44. Cherokee basket oak. 58
 Catalog No. 130476, Department of Anthropology, Smithsonian Institution. *Weaving New Worlds* (p. 177), Sarah Hill, 1997, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press.

Figure 45. Cherokee basket, honeysuckle. The Museum of Appalachia. Photograph by Roddy Moore. <i>Weaving New Worlds</i> (p. 194), Sarah Hill, 1997, Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.	58
Figure 46. Gypsy rocking chair. Photograph by the author.	63
Figure 47. Field chair. Photograph by the author.	64
Figure 48. Tall back field chair. Photograph by the author.	64
Figure 49. Small straight back chair. Photograph by the author.	64
Figure 50. Sofa. Photograph by the author.	65
Figure 51. Garden bench. Photograph by the author.	65
Figure 52. Table, heart top. Photograph by the author.	66
Figure 53. Table, heart sides. Photograph by the author.	66
Figure 54. Small shelf. Photograph by the author.	67
Figure 55. Dresser. Photograph by the author.	67
Figure 56. Chair with beaver sticks. Photograph by the author.	67
Figure 57. Sewing basket. Sketch courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	73

Figure 58. Creel.	73
Photograph courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 59. Back pack.	73
Photograph courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 60. Sciob.	75
Sketch courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 61. Crochan.	75
Photograph courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 62. Square shopper.	75
Photograph courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 63. Rolls basket.	75
Photograph courtesy of Bonnie Gale, Norwich, New York.	
Figure 64. Willow figure.	80
<i>The Guardian Weekend</i> , (p. 30-31), Georgia Glynn, Jan. 14, 1995, London.	

Chapter One

Introduction

“Human population stands at a record 5.8 billion. Since the Industrial Revolution atmospheric carbon dioxide levels have risen from an estimated 280 parts per million to 362 parts per million, the highest in 150,000 years” (Brown, 1997, p. 11). Oil tanker spills, nuclear reactor leaks, deterioration of the ozone layer, unstable toxic waste dumps, respiratory illnesses due to elusive industrial and mechanical emitters, diminishing resources, endangered species, and all the catastrophic effects of widespread land, air and water pollution are environmental issues that are complicated, involving politics, government, economics, business, science, culture, society and other diverse and often unpredictable elements. (Lankford, 1997, p. 52). “The mainstream scientific community, represented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2,500 of the world’s leading atmospheric scientists) now find evidence that human activity is indeed altering the earth’s climate” (Brown, 1997, p. 17). Technocracy, consisting of the union between science, technology and bureaucracy (Bower, 1980), and its political and economic influence, as well as the accompanying acculturation processes are some contributing factors to the most critical global environmental crises of our time. The state of the world is calling our attention to concepts of sustainability and our lost sense of place, which are two essential components of the stewardship mentality that we must adopt if humankind is to survive into the twenty-first century.

In many postmodern Western cultures humans have come to see themselves as separate from their environment. Putting nature in the position of the "other" to be overcome, conquered, controlled, exploited. We have alienated ourselves from the very places that empower us. Our sense of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going has been lost. The homelessness endemic in our postmodern culture can perhaps be viewed as symptomatic of our disconnectedness from place. Contemporary art critic Lucy Lippard (1997) states that place is the geographical component of the psychological need to belong somewhere, one antidote to a prevailing alienation. Nostalgia, the lure of the local, and the quaint, are undertones to modern life that connect us to the past we know so little and the future we are so aimlessly concocting. Lippard goes on to state that place is latitudinal and longitudinal within the map of a person's life. It is temporal and spatial, personal and political. A layered location replete with human histories and memories, place has width as well as depth, it is about connections, what surrounds it, what formed it, what happened there, what will happen there.

The knowledge of a place, where you are and where you come from, is intertwined with the knowledge of who you are. "The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes" (Lopez, 1989, p. 86). This type of intimate knowledge of our landscapes is rapidly disappearing, which reflects the impoverishment of our mental landscapes (Lopez, 1989). We no longer have a deep psychological reverence for the places in which we live. For the most part we have become transient people, residing in physical places rather than completely dwelling in an interdependent relationship with the

land. Our immediate places are no longer sources of food, water, livelihoods, energy materials, friends, recreation or spiritual inspiration. Fewer people these days grow up on farms or in rural areas where it is easy to learn a degree of competence and self-confidence toward the natural world. One way to re-establish a sense of place is through direct contact with the natural aspects of a place, with soils, landscape, wildlife etc. Wendell Berry (1981) has recognized the need for humankind to re-establish a relationship with the land, stating that “we need to re-inhabit our places, lovingly, knowingly, skillfully, reverently, restoring context to our lives.”

To live sustainably means to reflect an understanding of the ecological crisis the world is facing, and to reflect this consciousness, in our ability to make choices that will make a difference (Bowers, 1995; Orr, 1992). Humankind needs to develop an understanding of the interdependent relationships of all life forms on earth. If we want life on earth to continue as we know it, we must make informed choices that will promote the sustainability of the earth.

In the details of daily living we can make a difference. Things as simple as choosing paper instead of plastic, or better yet supplying your own reusable carrying containers at the grocery, can reflect concepts of sustainability, which have far reaching repercussions. For example, making plastic bags uses oil-based derivatives, which pollute the environment. Making paper bags requires trees, and in some instances exacerbates problems of deforestation. Both of these processes require industry in their manufacture which employs machinery and fuel instead of hand processes, which require interdependent relationships between people and natural materials.

With industry, the separation of hand and mind increases and as a result the concept of work changes (Blandy, 1987). When a person no longer has control over his or her own labor, as when employed by industry to operate machinery, punching a time clock, and depending on someone else for a paycheck, the realm of freedom becomes confined, and the concept of leisure is created. Leisure is often differentiated from work by the choice of consumables, and in turn our modern and postmodern culture of over-consumption impacts the environment.

Using a handmade willow basket to carry groceries instead of paper or plastic bags, is a more sustainable choice, because willow work utilizes natural materials provided by the earth, it entails a relationship between the artisan and the material, provides sustainable employment for the artisan making the basket, and the basket is reusable. These characteristics give the basket an aesthetic value and quality that only the sustainably-minded can appreciate. The basket reflects concepts of sustainability on many levels as it requires interdependent relationships between the artisan and the materials and does not impact the environment in a negative way.

When we come to realize the interdependent relationships that exist on earth, perhaps humankind can re-establish the lost sense of place that is characteristic of modern and postmodern times. A sense of place can be re-established by developing an interdependent relationship with the earth, which naturally develops concepts of sustainability. One way this interdependent relationship can be achieved is through an understanding and appreciation of traditional art forms. Traditional art forms; basketry, pottery, weaving, furniture making, require interdependent relationships between the

materials, processes, artisan and traditions. These relationships are beneficial to the artisan, the environment and their relationship to each other.

Tradition, by its very nature, is linked to sustainability. In traditional art forms cultural practices are passed on in form, function and methods of manipulation. As cultural practices are passed on, a sense of the past is alive in the present, establishing a sense of place for individuals, and within families, communities, countries etc. Traditions provide us with history, which gives a sense of place in the here and now. Traditional art forms are embedded in culture and place. They tell the stories of people, of places and culture. They tell social histories, reflect ways of life, and indicate what is of value. Traditional art forms are about places.

In his 1987 dissertation, "Traditional Basketmaker's in the Southeastern and South Central United States," Timmy Joe Bookout observed the three fold relationships of continuity of traditional basketry to (a) the land, (b) the body, and (c) the community or family, and examined the interdependent relationships between them. In her 1980 dissertation, "Rag Rugs and Rug Makers of Western Maryland," Geraldine Johnson also detailed the function of craft in its community context, and then went on to illustrate how community values shape the craft and the interdependent relationships between the art form and the place which produced it. Both Bookout, and Johnson clearly illustrate that traditional art forms are embedded in culture and place, telling the stories of people, of places, of culture. They tell social histories, reflect ways of life, and indicate what is of value. They also can express the deepest ideals of a person's way of life. Traditional art forms inherently form the ties that bind us to a place.

Traditions are passed on through hand processes, form and function.

Relationships between materials, processes and the artisan are interdependent. The earth provides the artist with the material to create. These materials are representative of the places from which they come. Hand processes that employ natural materials that are provided from the earth connect the artisan to the land. A sense of place is established for the artisan, as an artisan, and as a bearer of tradition. The traditions employed in technique and methods of manipulation reflect places. The artisan uses these techniques to create aesthetically pleasing objects that serve multilayered sustainable purposes, while at the same time developing a multilayered sense of place.

In this thesis the traditional art form of Appalachian willow work will be examined, and how this particular art form can re-establish a sense of place and develop concepts of sustainability will be illustrated. In the next chapter, a brief introduction to willow work is provided. Therein is described the willow plant, its natural properties and uses, a geographical description of the Appalachian region, and an introduction to Appalachian willow work. This will provide a framework for understanding the material (willow) and the place (Appalachia) and the relationship between the two in Appalachian willow work. The cultural and historical traditions that have influenced Appalachian willow work are identified and described in Chapter Three. It is here that one will begin to see the potential for the multilayered interdependent relationships between traditions and the history and places they reflect. The work of three contemporary Appalachian willow workers and the traditions they sustain in their work are examined in Chapter Four. In this chapter how the interdependent relationships between the artisan, the materials, and the process, can

establish a sense of place and develop concepts of sustainability are illustrated. The final chapter provides implications for the use of traditional art forms, Appalachian willow work in particular, for teaching concepts of sustainability and a sense of place in art education. It also illustrates how these concepts can answer the call of contemporary reconstructivist art educators, for context, relevance, and environmental literacy.

Chapter Two

Defining Appalachian Willow Work

The substance of willow work, as the name implies, comes from the willow plant. Willow grows into both shrubs and trees, and can be found from arctic to temperate zones, and flourishes from seacoasts to mountain highlands. Willow grows in the “wild” and can also be cultivated. Throughout time, willow rods, which are the stems of the willow plant, have been woven together and/or manipulated using a variety of different methods for a multitude of purposes. Items such as house baskets (sewing, laundry, etc.), storage containers, measuring containers, fish traps, baby cradles, various types of household furniture such as beds, chairs and tables, were and are some of the items made from willow. The kinds of willow work practiced in each region of the world are determined by the particular needs, traditions, aesthetic considerations and by the variety and suitability of the accessible willow material.

In this chapter relevant terminology will be clarified, the willow plant will be described in detail by giving a thorough description of varieties, propagation and cultivation techniques as well as the uses of willow. Following that, the geography of the Appalachian region and the general cultural settlement will be described. The chapter will conclude with an introduction to Appalachian willow work. Thus, this chapter will contain the essential components for understanding Appalachian willow work.

Willow

Because the terminology used to describe willow and willow work can often be confusing, it may need some clarification. Baskets and other items woven from pliant young shoots of woody shrubs and young trees are often described as ‘*withy*’ and ‘*withework*’. Both of these words are derived from the Old English *widthe*, meaning any tough flexible twig or stem suitable for binding things together. “In England today, ‘withy’ usually refers to shoots of osier or basket willow (*salix* species)” (Gordon, 1984, p. 3). Basket willow is a species of *salix* that is commonly called osier. Willow and osier are common terms used for all the species of *salix*.

The word *wicker* can be used to describe a technique or it may refer to the material used in the construction of a basket or other object. The two uses of this word may be explained by its double derivation: of one as a verb, from the Anglo- Saxon *wiccan*, meaning “to bend” and the other as a noun, from the Swedish *vikker*, meaning “willow” (Gordon, 1984, p. 3). “Wicker is also a generic term which is used to denote any kind of woven plant work used for house furnishings” (McHugh, 1966, p. 29).

To most people, willow probably brings to mind the large black willow trees, the smaller weeping willow varieties or the willow bushes with their soft gray catkins (pussy willow) blooming in early spring found along river banks. The willow is a simple plant whose characteristics vary from species to species. The common osier is *genus salix* (meaning willow). There are some 300 to 500 species of *salix* plants, with more than 100 species growing in the northern hemisphere (Ruff, 1991). Some 40 of these can be found in mountainous regions (Verdet- Fierz, 1993).

Willow grows throughout most of North America, but because it hybridizes in nature, true identification is often impossible. There is no characteristic that is entirely typical of one species. The large genus of willows (*salix*) characteristic of wet soils includes shrubs and mostly small trees, often having several stems or trunks from the base and forming thickets. In the summer, many willows develop long shoots that are generally very pliant yet tough (Figure 1). It is these year-old woody rods that can be used for weaving. The heavier, thicker, older growth can be used for other forms of willow work, furniture, handles, cooping, artwork etc. The Audubon Society identifies 11 species of *salix* which grow in North America in their 1991 *Field Guide to North American Trees*: White Willow, Peachleaf Willow, Weeping Willow, Bebb Willow, Coastal Plain willow, Pussy Willow, Sandbar Willow, Florida Willow, Crack Willow, Black Willow and Basket Willow. Of these eleven species, all are native to North America except the White Willow, Weeping Willow, Crack Willow and Basket Willow, (which is commonly called osier).

Not all willow is used for weaving or other forms of manipulation. Bernard and Regula Verdet-Fierz, the Swiss authors of *Willow Basketry*, describe the willows that are ideal for weaving, making sure to remind the reader of the numerous subspecies and hybrids that have either occurred by accident or have been bred specifically for the purpose of weaving. It is probable that the varieties listed by Verdet- Fierz are some of those that were brought to America with the early immigrants, the exception being the American Willow, which was naturalized into Europe from America (Lasansky, 1978). The species they list include: Common Osier (basket willow osier) is ideal for items made

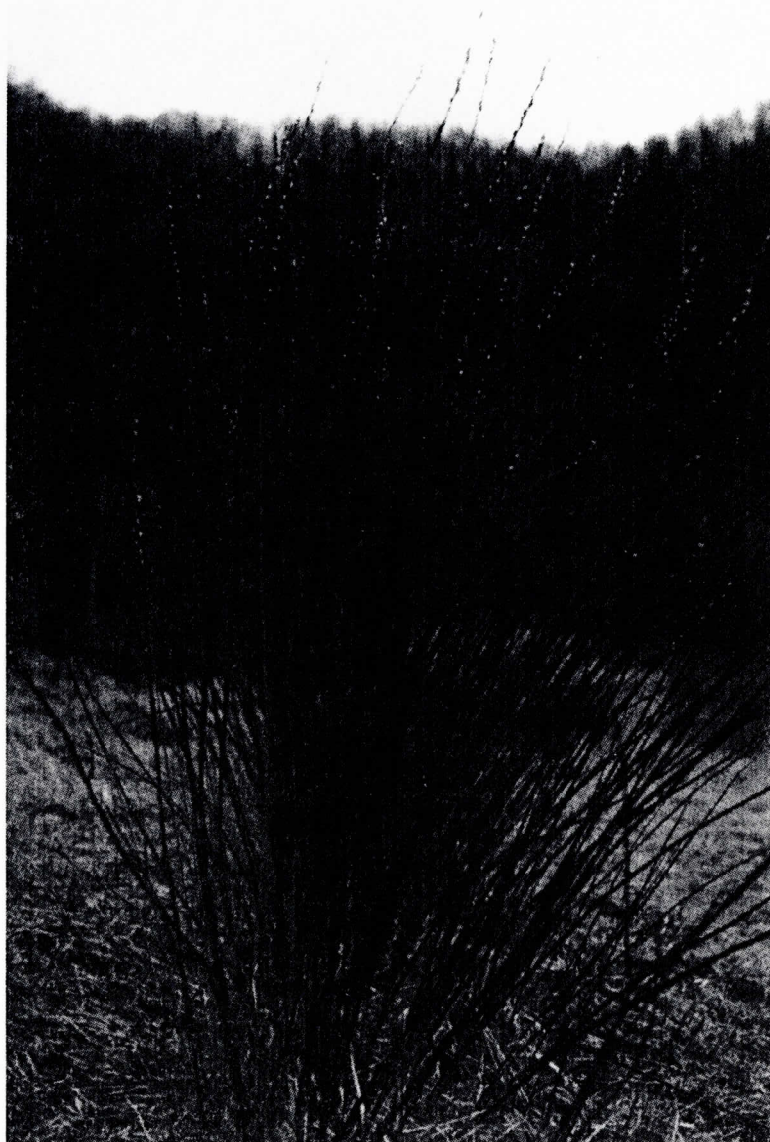


Figure 1. Spring willow.

with the bark still left on the rods. But because the wood is white it is often peeled.

When drying, the wood shrinks and cracks and fissures appear. It is also good for cultivating two to three-year-old willow sticks which can be used for corners, handles and hoops for coopering (barrel making). Almond Willow, has green, gray or grayish white, marble painted rods are three to four feet long and are very thin relative to their length and very pliant. The Almond Willow is ideal for open work and braided weave structures.

Purple Osier, the reddish brown, one-year-old rods grow to a length of three to four feet.

The rods are the same width along their entire length and they are difficult to peel. The very tough, thin rods are ideal for fine work. Crack Willow, the branches form almost right angles and make a snapping sound when broken off. The colors of the bark can be shades of yellow, brownish grey or olive green. The rods are used for general basketry.

American Willow has rods that are tough, thin and pliant. The bark is brownish green and changes to red toward the tips of the rods. The American Willow is the most frequently used osier for basket weaving worldwide.

Almost all willows are pioneer plants, which means they can grow in barren environments and adapt themselves easily. The plant loves damp soil and sunny locations, but can also grow on stony, compacted soil. As mentioned earlier, willow can grow into trees or shrubs, or be trained to grow into other shapes.

Pollard willow, sometimes called head willow, is a shape that the willow grows into after controlled pruning. The best pollard willows are White Willow, Common Osier, Crack Willow and Almond Willow (Verdet-Fierz, 1993). The second year after planting, when the winter is over, all shoots except the strongest one is pruned. The strongest

shoot is then cut at about 12 inches. The next winter this shoot will be about 18 inches. The new shoots are trimmed back every winter or at least every three years to the height of the trunk, and over the years the trunk takes on the shape of a head. Pollard Willows are called farmers' willows because farmers used this method of cultivation to supply willow for their weaving.

In fact, willow fields have been cultivated since Roman times (Verdet, 1993, p. 26). Cultivating willow fields means cutting them so that they grow as single shoots emerging out of the soil. Thus, they are shrubs without branches arranged in straight rows. The easiest way to obtain new willows for this method of cultivation is by vegetative reproduction, using cuttings from a mature plant. The cuttings are stuck into the ground and if the soil is damp enough the cuttings will take root and begin to grow new shoots.

Willow is harvested when the leaves have fallen and the willow is empty of sap. Between November and March, or in "December under a waning moon" (Verdet- Fierz, 1993, p. 48), the plants are cut at ground level, leaving small stumps. When harvesting wild willows, look for long rods free of branches. Rods are one-year-old wood. Sticks are rods that have been growing for two to four years. These are typically used for frames of furniture and sometimes referred to as benders, or stakes in wattle and daub (a woven building framework), handles and other larger willow work.

Green willow work is done as soon as possible after the willow is harvested, and white willow work is done with fresh willows which have been peeled and processed to achieve the whitest color possible. Buff willow work is done with rods that have been

boiled to achieve a tan color, while brown willow work is done with the bark still on the rods. Skeins are peeled willow rods that are split into three or more clefts with a cleave and then processed into fine, flat, oval lengths with a shave and upright. Willow rods can be dried and stored for several months when protected from sun and rain. Willow that has been stored must then be soaked to bring it back to life before use.

Willow is and has been used for a variety of purposes throughout time. "Willow is rich in lore and in practicality, serving mankind in the landscape and in the home shop" (Rodale, 1987, p. 503). The uses of willow include: 1. Medicinal: the bark and leaves are used for pharmaceutical purposes, they contain flavone compounds and phenolic glucosides, tannin, salicin, and relaxants, which have traditionally been used to make infusions and teas to ease fevers, headaches and rheumatism. 2. Beekeeping: bees collect pollen from the catkins. Visiting both male and female blossoms, the female stigmas are pollinated. 3. Natural building materials; engineers are using willow for retaining walls. Many varieties root quickly and hold soil. When planted by flowing water, willow reduces the speed of flow and promotes sedimentation. 4. Ornamental: in gardens willow shrubs and trees are planted for their colorful barks. Weeping Willows are found in parks and along shores of lakes and ponds. In America the first "weeping willows" were grown by Samuel Johnson, an Angelican clergyman from cuttings taken from a tree growing beside a house in Twickenham, England, once occupied by the British poet Alexander Pope. From Johnson's plantings along the Housatonic River in Connecticut, the willows spread far and wide: George Washington planted them at Mt. Vernon, and James Madison at his home in Montpelier (Rodale, 1987). 5. Carpentry Wood: some willows are harvested for

low quality carpenters' wood. Because of its quick growth, it is easy to work, but not very durable. It is finely pored with even grain structure. 6. Pulp Wood: fast-growing species of willow are being cultivated for the purposes of producing biomass and forestry breeding. It has also been used for paper pulp. 7. Weaving: willow is an important source of basket making material. Species and varieties with long, flexible shoots and little pith (the soft inside of the stem) are used. They yield a greater wood content and result in a more durable object.

The Appalachian Region

Evidence suggests that the Appalachian region was named in the sixteenth century by Hemando Desoto, a Spanish explorer who was one of the first to explore the southern part of the Appalachians. As the theory goes, the name came from a Native American tribe (or village), the Apalachee of northern Florida (Raitz and Ulack, 1984). From that time until the Civil War, "Appalachia" was simply a term for the physiographic mountain system (Figure 2).

The first regional delimitation of Appalachia was made in 1861 by the geographer Arnold Guyot, who divided the system into parallel mountain ranges, and then divided the system north to south into three subregions. Geologically, the Appalachian system extends from Newfoundland through Oklahoma to Texas, some 1,400 miles North to South (Guyot, 1861).

The most widely recognized of the early sociocultural delimitations of the southern Appalachian region is that of John C. Campbell, which appeared in *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland* in 1921 (Figure 3). Campbell called the region "the

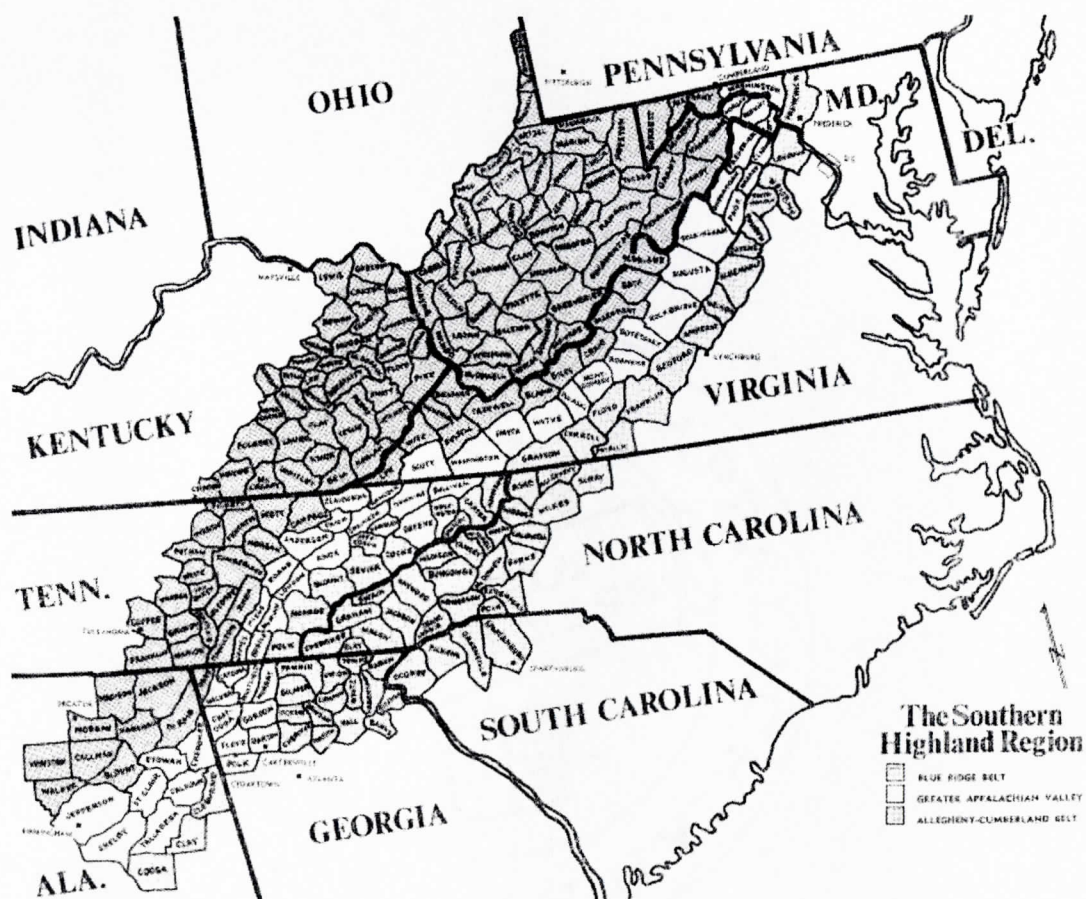


Figure 3. Map, The Southern Highland Region.

Southern Highlands” and included 254 counties in nine states and used historical, political and physical criteria to arrive at his boundary.

The most recent attempt at regional delimitation of Appalachia occurred in 1965. The Appalachian Regional Development Act established the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) and defined the Appalachian Region (Figure 4). The boundaries of the original ARC Region were based on both natural environmental and socioeconomic characteristics (Raitz and Ulack, 1984, p. 23).

Much of the Appalachian region was occupied by Native Americans when European colonists arrived in the Atlantic seaboard colonies in the early seventeenth century. The fifteen-seventeen Native American tribes that lived in the region affected the manner in which colonists were able to move into the interior (Raitz and Ulack, 1984, p. 87). European contact with Native American Indians gradually increased, as did the merging of cultural traditions.

New England, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the west Chesapeake Tidewater country were major areas from which people and ideas gradually moved into the Appalachian region (Figure 5). Each of the three coastal cultural areas was basically English in character, but by 1720 Germans and Scotch-Irish also began to arrive. They were then joined by Welsh, French Huguenots, Irish, Swiss, and other northern Europeans. By the 1880s, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Serbs, Croats, Ukrainians, Hungarians and other eastern and southern Europeans began to arrive in the coal and steel towns of Appalachia’s interior (Raitz and Ulack, 1984). However, the main cultural elements that were eventually to influence the cultural development of Appalachia were Native

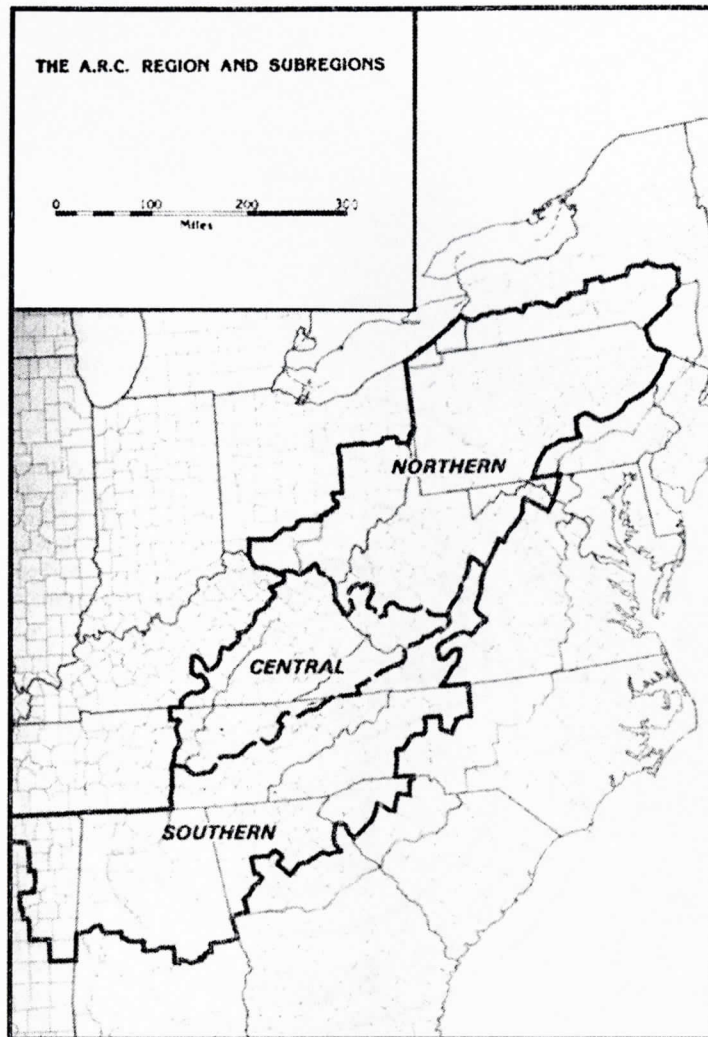


Figure 4. Map, The A.R.C. region and subregions.

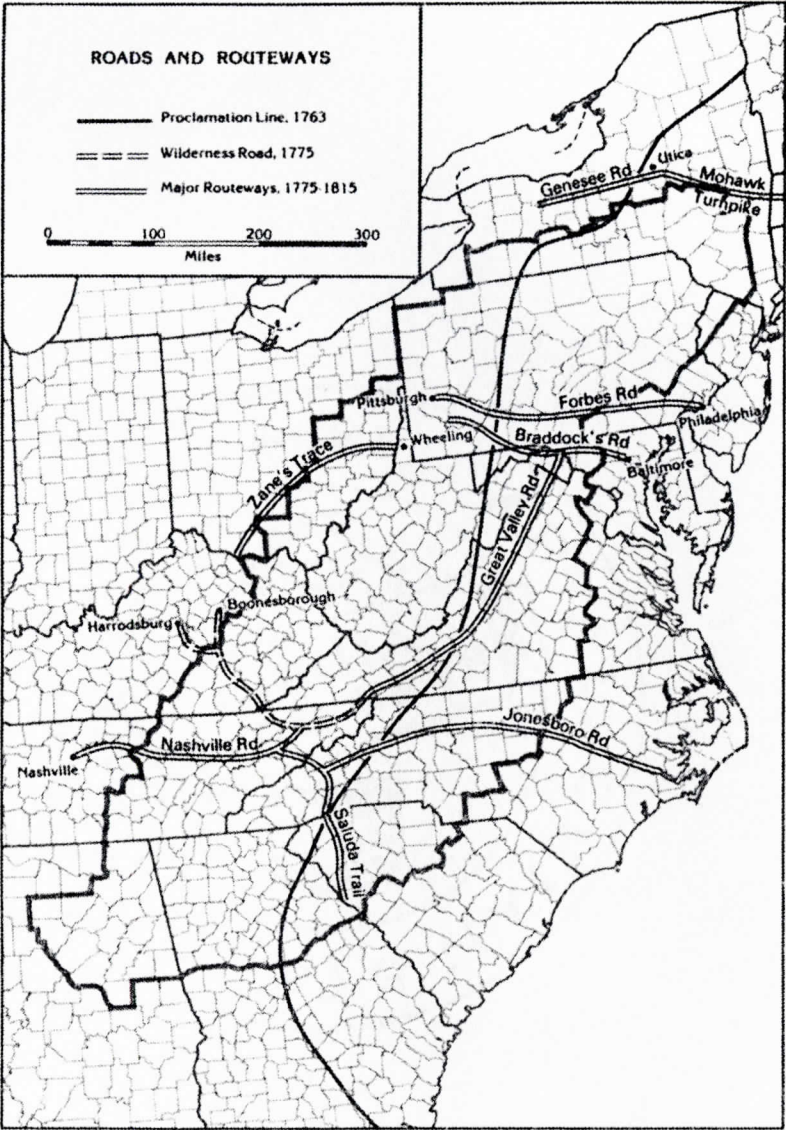


Figure 5. Map, Roads and Routeways.

American, English, German, Scotch-Irish and because the Germans and Scotch-Irish outnumbered other European groups, they became the principal carriers of influence.

Appalachian Willow Work

Prior to European contact there is no evidence to indicate that the Native American tribes living within the Appalachian region used willow for any purpose. Archeological evidence suggests that the oldest eastern North American fiber perishables include a variety of forms, notably flexible bags or mats, containers of an unspecified configuration and nets which use the three major manufacturing techniques of coiling, plaiting and twining. By Middle Archaic Times (6000-4000 BC) sophisticated twining is evidenced in the Southeast. By Late Archaic Times (4000-1000 BC) highly elaborated twining is evidenced in the Northeast. By the onset of the Woodland Period (1000 BC-1550 AD), the technological foundations of fiber perishable production had firmly been established over the entire eastern half of the continent. However, the exact form and attendant functions of these articles are often difficult to reconstruct. Moreover, the favored raw materials used in their construction and certain details of their manufacture remain elusive (Peterson, 1966). Even though many species of the osier plant, shrub and tree occur naturally in different areas of the Appalachian region (U.S. Dept. Of Agriculture, 1914), evidence of its use does not appear until contact with Europeans.

Tribes in the Northeast stitched birchbark vessels (Figure 6) and later plaited woodsplint baskets (Figure 7) as their dominant containers, while tribes in the Southeast are best known for their colorful, finely woven plain and twill plaited cane basketry (Figure 8), (Turnbaugh and Turnbaugh, 1986). It has even been suggested that the well-



Figure 6. Birch bark basket, box decorated with porcupine quills.
Northeast 1799. Margaretville, Annapolis County,
Nova Scotia.

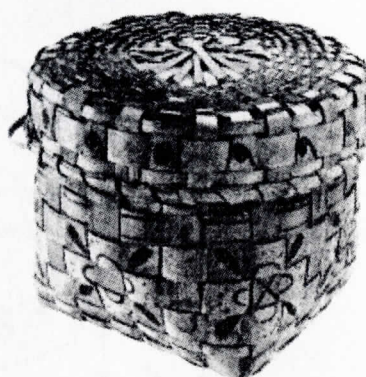


Figure 7. Woodsplint basket, lidded storage basket,
plaited black ash splints.
Nipmuck, or possibly Mohegan.



Figure 8. Twill plaited basket.
Cherokee, North Carolina.

known plaited "wood split" basketry of the Northeastern woodland tribes was a European introduction (Peterson, 1966, p. 7). Lasansky (1978) states that flat woodsplint baskets were made in Northern Great Britain and Scandinavia and became common in America in ribbed, plaited and spoked constructions. Only upon European contact does evidence of willow work begin to appear (Figures 9, 10, 11 and 12). Evidence of European willow traditions in Native American basketry begins to appear as well (Figure 13). European willow traditions also begin to appear in other plant materials that are indigenous to the Appalachian region, such as oak (Figure 14) and later with the naturalized honeysuckle vines (Figure 15), not to mention saplings from various other plants such as poplar, maple, elm, alder, beechwood and dogwood.

The willow work found in Appalachia is distinctly of European decent. It involves weaving techniques and other methods of manipulation that Native Americans did not employ. Dorothy Wright (1977) describes five basic basketry construction techniques: Stake and strand (Figure 12), frame or rib (Figure 10), coiled (Figure 16), plaited (Figure 8) and twined (Figure 17). Native Americans did not employ stake and strand or frame or rib construction, which are characteristic of willow work in their basketry nor did they employ simple methods of joinery (Figures 18, 19 and 20) or any forms of surface manipulation (Figure 21) that are found in willow furniture that are indicative of European willow traditions.

Upon European settlement into America, evidence of willow cultivation also appears. Native North American willows which grew heavily in river beds and marsh lands were considered unfriendly by some, thus willow beds and fields were cultivated in certain

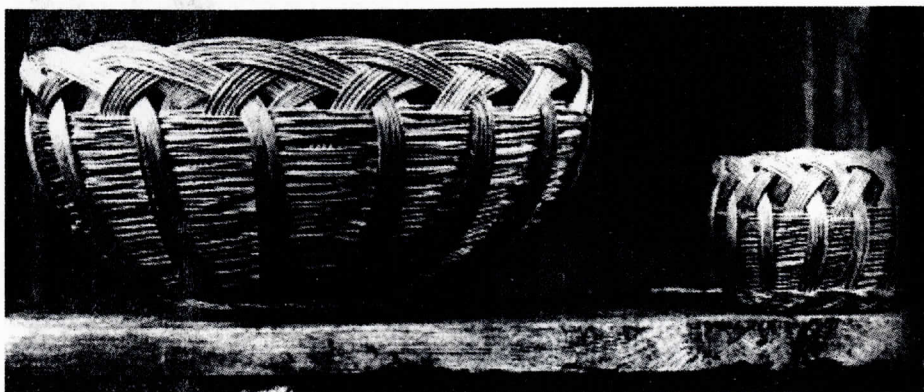


Figure 9. Appalachian willow work. Willow sewing baskets.
Early 20th century, Union County, Tennessee.

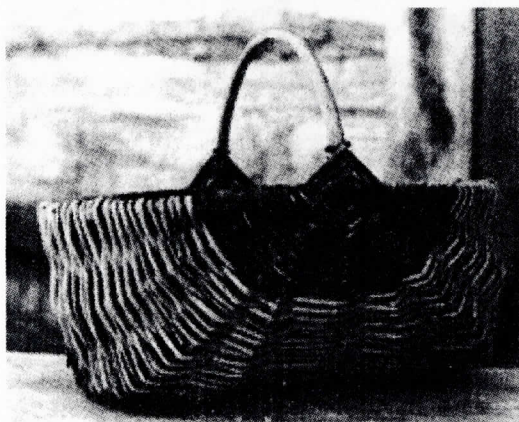


Figure 10. Appalachian willow work. Frame
and rib basket made of peeled and unpeeled
willow.
Roanoke, Virginia.



Figure 11. Appalachian willow work. Willow market basket with maderia border.
Brought to Greenbreir County, West Virginia from Maryland in 1880.



Figure 12. Appalachian willow work. Willow field basket.
Eastern Ohio.

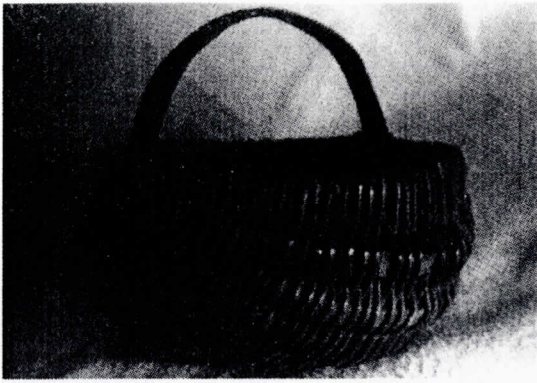


Figure 13. Willow traditions in Native American basketry.
Eunice Mauwee, Scaticook, 1859, Ellis Lake, Connecticut.

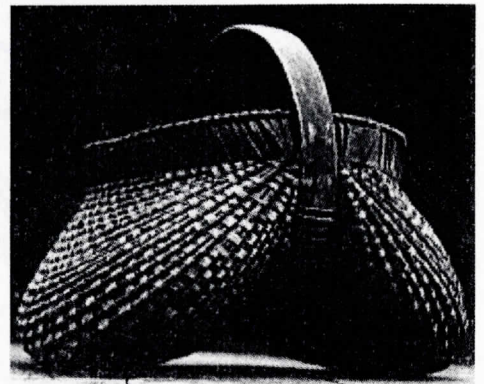


Figure 14. Willow traditions in oak, Appalachian gizzard basket.
Yancey County, North Carolina.

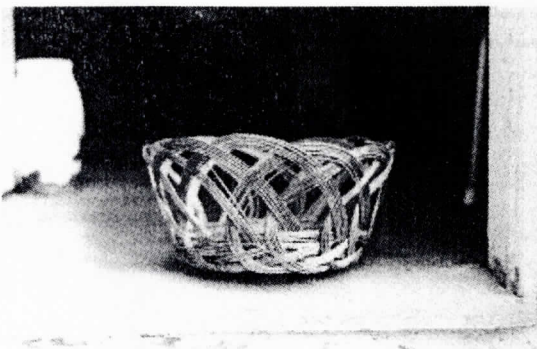


Figure 15. Willow traditions in honeysuckle, Sewing and trinket basket.
Middle, Tennessee.



Figure 16. Coiled, Seminole basket, bundle coiled, spaced stitches.
Seminole, Southeast Heartland subarea, Georgia or Florida.



Figure 17. Twined, wool, bark, cornhusks. Narragansett twined bag.
Narragansett c. 1675, Eastern Algonkian subarea, Fields Point, Rhode Island,
Rhode Island Historical Society.

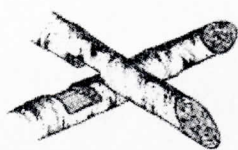


Figure 18. Joinery, lap. Two pieces notched to fit tightly together.

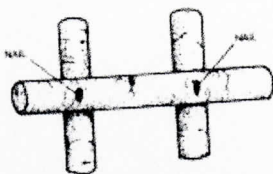


Figure 19. Joinery, overlap. One member fits over an adjoining piece.

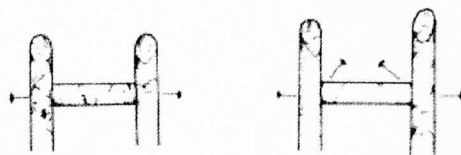


Figure 20. Joinery, butt. The end of one member fits flush against the other.

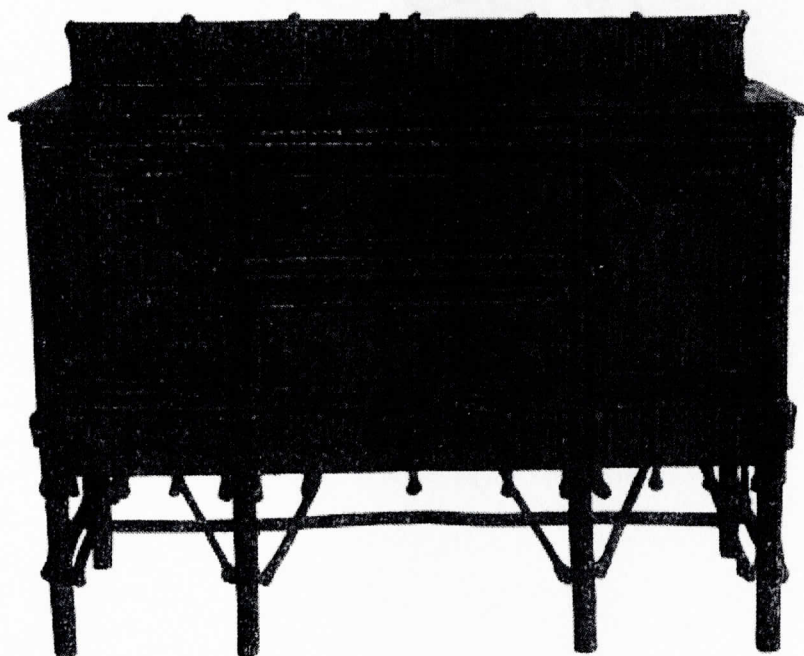


Figure 21. Rustication and mosaic work. Sideboard by Ben Davis, built around 1920.

areas. In 1835 the New York State magazine, *The Cultivator*, urged farmers to cultivate a patch of willow, and by 1914 the U.S. Department of Agriculture published *Farmer's Bulletin* no. 622 on Basket Willow Culture. Law & Taylor (1991) have documented several cultivated willow beds. Stephenson (1977) has documented two small areas in West Virginia where a species of basket willow (*Salix purpurea*) is growing. Lasansky (1978) has made reference to Milton Lorah's willow bed behind his store in Basket, Pennsylvania, and to willow kept by the Zongs and David Moad in Juniata County, Pennsylvania shortly after the turn of the twentieth century.

As immigrant groups began to move into and throughout the Appalachian region, their traditions spread as well (Figure 5). The following cultural traditions and settlement patterns are generalizations (Lasansky, 1978; Raitz & Ulack, 1984; Stephenson, 1977). The English, many of whom were basketmaker's by trade, initially settled into different parts of New York, some settled in Liverpool, and others traveled west to Syracuse and Rochester where the willow basketry and furniture industry flourished. Some settled in the Tidewater region and moved directly west into Appalachia. They cultivated willow, and it is from here that we find the roots of a more refined, embellished and intricate "buff" and sometimes "white" willow work that is characteristic of house baskets and some willow furniture (Figure 9). The Scotch, Irish and Germans began settling into the farmlands of Pennsylvania. Some German groups continued westward into Ohio and beyond, and some Germans along with the Scotch and Irish continued southward. The Germans began to employ their willow traditions using the indigenous white oak, making sturdy agricultural baskets (Figure 14). The Scotch and Irish in particular carried rib and

frame construction methods into southern Appalachia, using unpeeled, wild willows, and eventually the white oak (Figure 10).

Gypsy groups traveling up and down the Shenandoah Valley from New York south through Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, and on through Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina must have been some of the principal, yet obscure carriers of a mixture of cultural traditions. Ironically, as they seemingly borrowed from many traditions, they developed their own unique tradition of rustic bent willow furniture (Figure 22). The English Arts and Crafts Movement spawned a similar movement in the United States at the turn of the century. Seeking simpler values and back to nature lifestyles, the rustic furniture movement began and various regional styles evolved. Once again gypsy tradition moved these styles about. By 1890 much of the traditional handicrafts in the Appalachian region were disappearing. Educated, northern philanthropists moved south and using the already existent self-reliant, southern craft tradition, began the southern crafts revival. This revivalist influence is evident in some early Appalachian willow work (Figure 23). The 1960's and 70's mark another arts and crafts revival that took place all over America, and this re-emergence of art and craft traditions brought forth another revivalist influence that is also evident in most contemporary Appalachian willow work. Each cultural group and historical period carries with it, its own unique and characteristic traditions.

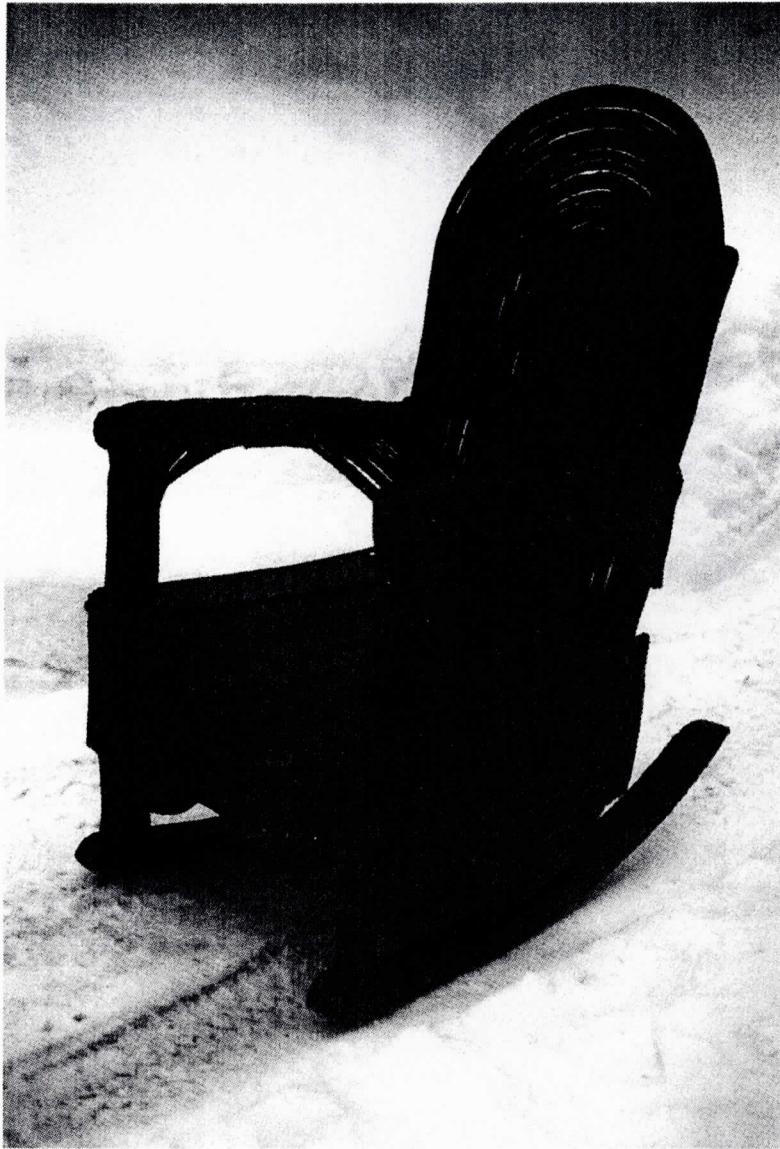


Figure 22. Gypsy, rustic traditions. A dramatic Southern twig chair thought to be made by the gypsies in the Appalachians during the early part of this century.

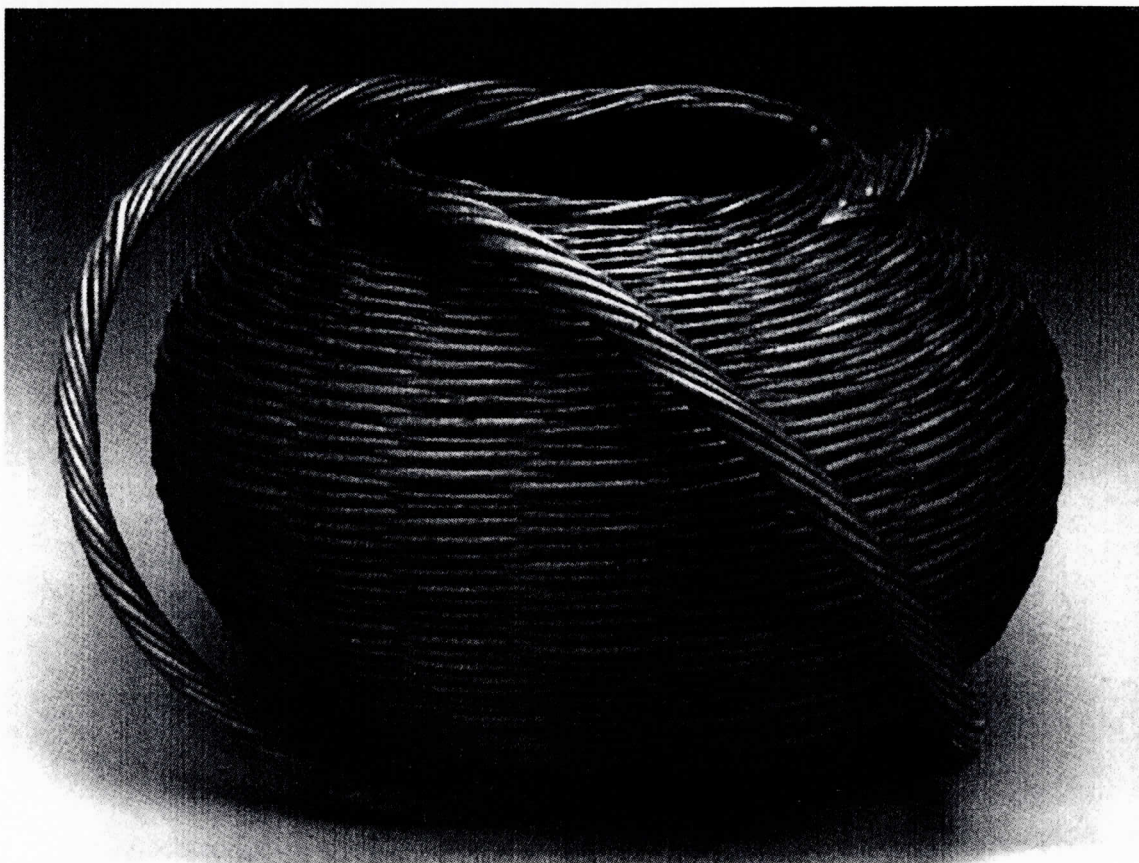


Figure 23. Revival traditions. "Dream basket."
Aunt Cord Ritchie, 1920. Itindman, Kentucky.

Chapter Three

Cultural and Historical Traditions in Appalachian Willow Work

The English, Scotch, Irish and Germans were the main cultural groups that settled into the Appalachian region. All of these cultures have a history of willow work.

Characteristic willow traditions may be found in form, function, methods of manipulation and construction techniques in each cultural group as well as variations within each group.

The historical traditions found in Appalachian willow work have been shaped by a blending of these cultural influences, as well as social influences, throughout time. Gypsy groups that traveled throughout the region are seemingly responsible for blending cultural and historical traditions. Evidence of these distinctive cultural and historical traditions may be found in the willow work that has been documented throughout the Appalachian region. In this chapter English, Scotch, Irish, German, Gypsy, Rustic, and Revival willow traditions are defined and described.

English Traditions

The history of willow in England goes back at least to 150 BC, the time of the lake villages at Mare and Glastonbury in Somerset (Butcher, 1986, p. 5). Woven material was used to support the walls of the medieval harbor at Dover and for carrying building materials. It was also used extensively for baskets which had a wide variety of purposes: for agriculture as seed containers, as gathering baskets and winnowing fans, for fishing, as transport and even in war, where baskets filled with earth, for protective ramparts.

Early baskets in England were probably much like those found on farms in the highland regions until the second half of the twentieth century. These “rib and frame” baskets were constructed with wild materials. In lowland Britain (England) the weaving of willow, using the “stake and strand” method, developed into a profession and ultimately a sizeable industry. Guilds of basket makers were formed; records show that the Worshipful Company of Basket Makers of the City of London was established before 1469 (Heseltine, 1984, p. 4). This company was eventually granted a royal charter by George VI in 1937, but by then its old responsibilities had long since been taken on by the trade unions. The number of craftsmen employed and the output of their labors must have at one time been immense. Today, in many instances where now one uses cardboard, plastic or plywood for packing material, two hundred years ago, in England, these needs would have been met with wickerwork. Fruit and vegetables were gathered from the fields into baskets; fish, poultry and dairy produce were all packed into wicker for the journey to the town markets. Jobs requiring the transport of bulky materials such as manure or rubble needed baskets. Not only were rural items made of willow, but so were the fancy hat boxes, umbrella holders and traveling trunks of the well to do. In England we find a more refined type of willow work, sometimes using skinned willow, employing intricate borders and handles, leather corners and other embellished details (Figure 24).

In 1860 the “buff” or chestnut color that is characteristic of English “stake and strand willow work” was produced by steam peeling willow. In England we find mainly house baskets; hampers, sewing, market etc. and “wicker furniture” made of buff



Figure 24. English willow work. A bottle basket made of buff and white willow, known as a winchester.

willow because steam peeling helped accelerate the willow industry as the hand peeling of white willows was quite laborious.

“Madeira borders” can be attributed to English basket makers (Figure 25), although they are not English by nature. The Madeira border is an intricately woven braided bordering technique that is sometimes used to form the sides of a basket as well. They may have been introduced to England around 1807, when the British occupied Madeira, Spain for some seven years (Stephenson, 1977, p. 28). Stephenson also makes note that the style may have spread from southern Europe into Germany and documents a small madeira-style basket made of honeysuckle in Alleghany county, Virginia, where German settlements exist. Stephenson does not date their appearance in Appalachia before 1880. Law and Taylor (1991) have also documented a madeira-style basket in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia that was done with white oak rods (Figure 26).

Irish Traditions

Evidence of willow work has also been found in many of the crannogs, or lake dwellings of Ireland, habitations generally dating from the late Bronze Age to Early Christian times where many examples of wickerwork in flooring, walls and huts have been recorded. In Ballinderry Cranog in County Offaly in central Ireland, the late Bronze Age layers, dated between the fourth and the first century BC, revealed a number of small wicker huts and a larger structure which was also possibly constructed of wicker. It has been suggested that the walls of these huts were smeared with clay and that the roofs were thatched (O’Dowd, 1986, p. 118). In Dublin, Ireland recent excavations have produced a large circular base of a basket dated to the thirteenth century, and evidence for the use of

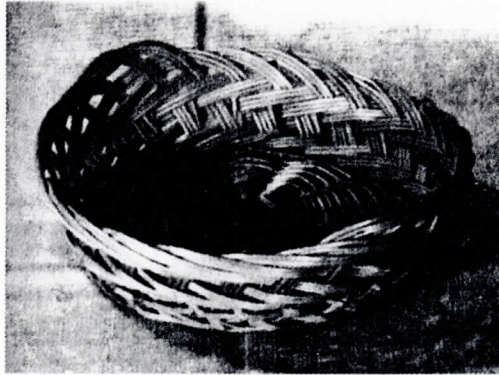


Figure 25. English Madeira border.
William Shelly of Salisbury, England.



Figure 26. Madeira border in Appalachian
oak.
Shenandoah Valley, Virginia.

wickerwork in fences, walls of houses, pathways, floor mats, internal curbs for marking off bedding areas within houses and also wicker doors. The wickerwork chimney was a common feature of vernacular house-building tradition, and in some cases, the wickerwork was extended into loft or storage areas on either side of the hearth. The main materials used were willow, hazel and silver birch.

The use of willow in Ireland increased after the final disappearance of Ireland's ancient forests, which accompanied the downfall and departure of the old Gaelic nobility. Ireland was exploited as a resource for England's timber consumption long before the Great Fire of London when a considerable amount of Irish Oak was used for rebuilding. One eighth of the land was forested in 1600. By 1800 that figure was reduced to a mere fiftieth (Kinmonth, 1993). The effects of such deforestation were exacerbated by the huge rise in population in the late eighteenth century, accompanied by a growing intensity of farming. A greater immediate profit could be gained from farming, than from planting young trees. As a result of this absence of wood, people resorted to a variety of alternative materials such as rush, straw, willow and even turf to furnish their homes.

"Sally" (willow) was used all over Ireland as an alternative to timber. It seems to grow readily in damp areas near lakes and rivers, which are plentiful in Ireland. In the Irish language "sally" appears as "saileach", and "slat saili" refers to the osier. At one time sally gardens were a common feature of rural Ireland. They were grown in banks and hedge rows, the cutting grouped in threes, one central, and two at a 45-degree angle at either side. This helped the growth of the thick woody clump. With the absence of wood

the cultivation of willow was a necessity, and began to flourish abundantly in many regions throughout the country.

By the nineteenth century, two main regions were noted for basket-making, Lough Neagh in Ulster and in the Suir Valley in northern Munster (O'Dowd, 1986). Sally was used not only by itinerant basket makers, but also by specialists, basket-making firms, and many who wove their own baskets whenever the necessity arose. The basketmaker was the provider of a vast range of containers from the fireside turf basket or kish, to the potato skib and cradle. A large variety of basket work objects were made and used on the farm. Their names and shapes varied from one region to the next. Creels were baskets used for carrying, and were commonly known and useful for a variety of purposes outside the home (Figure 27). Huge carrying creels formed an integral part of the primitive Irish block-wheel carts (Figure 28). Smaller creels with hinged bottoms were slung on one's back for transporting seaweed or turf. Lasansky (1978) documents a very primitive creel in Pennsylvania that is very similar to the creels from Ireland (Figure 29).

Basket makers wove frames of boats, lobster pots and potato bins which were made by driving stakes right into the floor, as well as small items such as calves' muzzles, baby rattles and bird cages. One of the most common basket work items used inside the Irish home, however, was the round potato skib or sciob (Figure 30). Potatoes, when boiled were turned out on a round shallow basket, a *scrahag* which is placed on top of the steaming hot pot in which they had just been boiled. Local names and variations include a *scuttle* (Clare), a *sciath* (Kikenny), *bascaid geal* or a *losaid* (Donegal), or a ciseog in Co. Galway and a potato "teeming" basket elsewhere (O'Dowd, 1986). A woman from

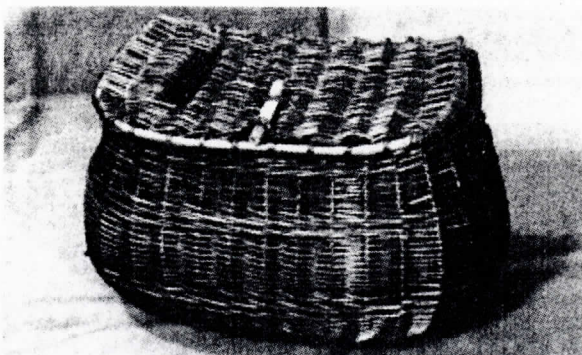


Figure 27. Creel, British Isles. This type of fly fisher's creel was popular at the turning of this century.



Figure 28. Creel, Irish.

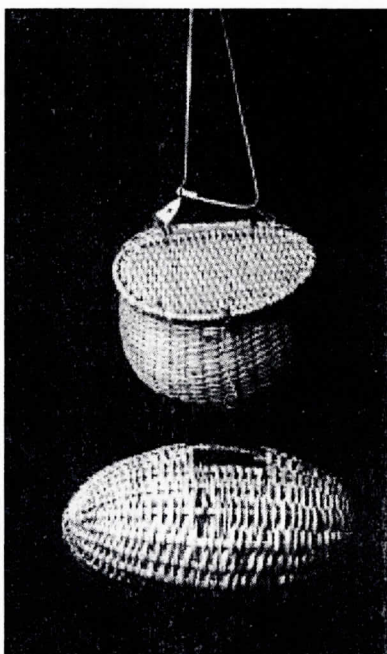


Figure 29. Creel and pigeon Basket, Appalachian.

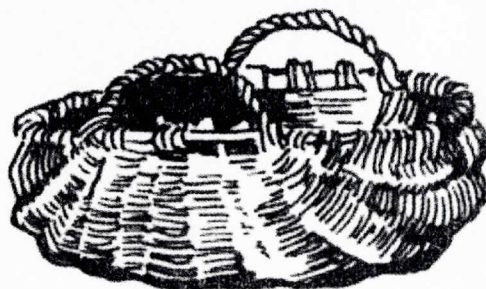


Figure 30. Irish potato scioib. Scib or cis (skep), also used for harvesting potatoes.

county Louth, born in 1871, said such sciobs were known locally as “sally saucers” because they were made out of sally rods (peeled osiers): “It would be all very white, real white: when it would get dirty or stained we used to take the sally saucer to the river and scrub it until it was white again” (Kinmonth, 1993, p. 179). Law and Taylor (1991) have documented this form in white oak, in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia (Figure 31) and in Bucks County, Pennsylvania (Figure 32).

Combinations of timber and wicker were used to make furniture as well (Figure 33). Dorothy Hartley, a keen observer of Irish craftsmanship, noticed on a trip to county Wicklow in the 1930's a chair made from ‘bent sallies and a naturally bent piece of apple bough, wedged into a wooden seat, and four strong, straight, axe-squared legs painted black (Delaney, 1982). In a country where the design of vernacular furniture was strongly influenced by a timber shortage, it is not surprising that willow and dozens of other pliant materials were used as alternatives. Unfortunately, the low value and fragility of the resulting objects mean that few examples have survived since dry willow is also one of the wood worm’s favorite foodstuffs.

Scottish Traditions

The Lowland Scots first emigrated to Northern Ireland before coming to Western Pennsylvania between 1707 and 1776, and eventually finding a new home in the Appalachians west of the Shenandoah Valley (Wright, 1977, p. 142). The “hen basket” is one basket in particular that can be attributed to perhaps a true Scottish origin. This is a unique frame and rib basket, where the ribs form the frame (Figure 34). According to Dorothy Wright in *Baskets and Basketry*, this basket is known in Scotland as an “Ose

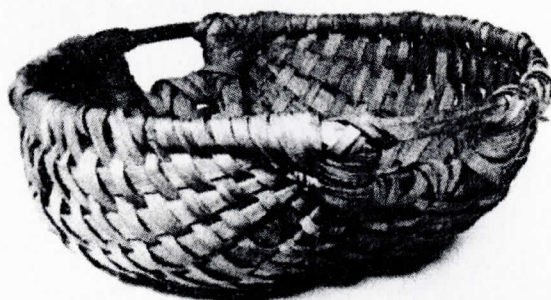


Figure 31. Appalachian sciob, called a coal basket. Made by the Day family in Shennandoah County, Virginia. Also found in central and eastern Pennsylvania, northwestern Virginia and occasionally further south.

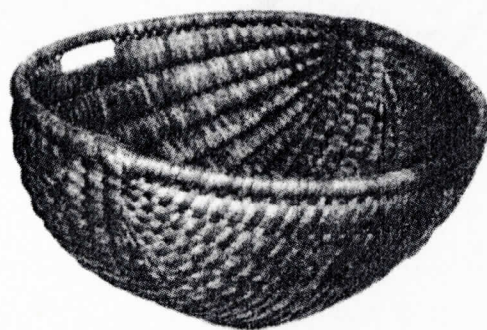


Figure 32. Appalachian sciob, Large agricultural basket. Peter Weirbach, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.



Figure 33. Timber and Wicker. Gypsy tables, sold by the roadside.
Early 20th century, Callan County, Kilkenny, Ireland.

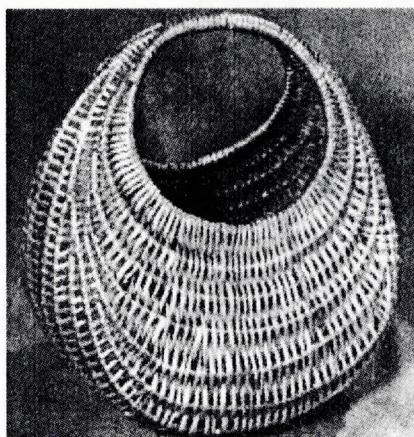


Figure 34. Traditional hen basket.
Scotland.

basket,” or the “Skye hen basket,” from the Isle of Skye where they are regularly made. They were used to carry broody hens from one farm to another in the days before incubators. It has been suggested, however, by the English that its origin is perhaps Scandinavian, where it incidentally is known as “The Scotch Basket.” Wright, however, believes its origins to be Celtic rather than Scottish. In Scotland today it is traditionally made with white willow. Its unusual shape has been found in the Appalachian region and called a Carolina basket (Figure 35) by Eaton (1973) and a Cherokee hen basket (Figure 36) by Law and Taylor (1991).

The Scottish *crealagh* also originates from the Isle of Skye (Wright, 1977). This basket was used to gather bits of wool pulled from hedgerows or sheep. It was also used for wool to be carded and was placed at the feet of the carder or spinner, often beside the fire because warmth makes the wool easier to card. It is made of frame and rib construction, in an ovoid shape, and is completely woven except for a hole the middle (Figure 37). Law and Taylor (1991), and Lasansky (1978) have documented this form in Appalachia (Figures 38 and 29).

German Traditions

Along the Bodensee, in Germany, baskets have been found that belong to the later Stone or Bronze Age. In pattern, construction, material, binding and weaving these baskets are very similar to baskets of barked or white-peeled whole willow that are made at the Trade School in Lichtenfels Germany today. In addition, the Trade School in Lichtenfels possesses several pieces having similarities in workmanship, which were found in rock tombs dating back to pre-Columbian times (Will, 1985, p. 13).

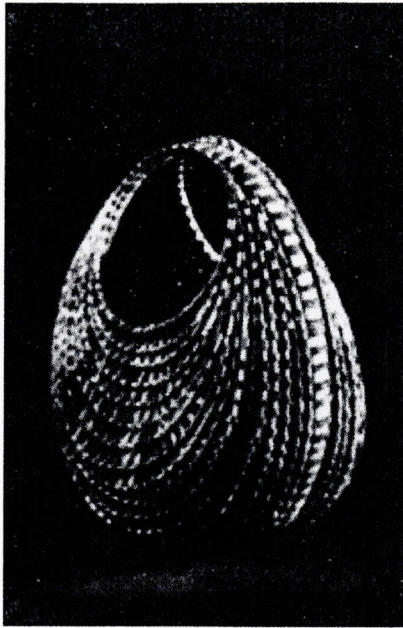


Figure 35. Appalachian hen basket.
"Carolina basket"
North Carolina.

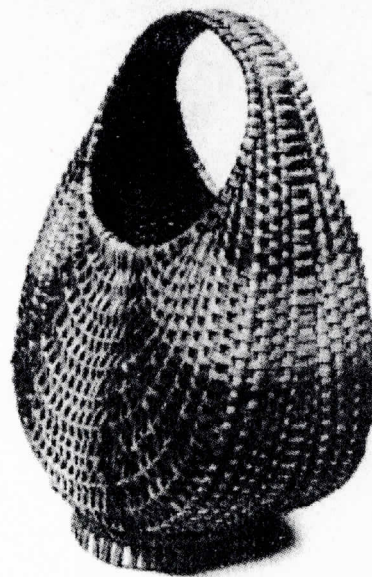


Figure 36. Cherokee hen basket,
woven with dyed splints.

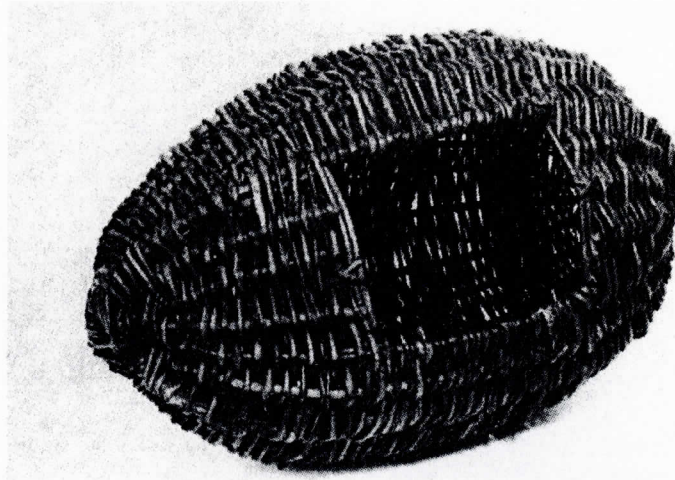


Figure 37. Scottish *crealagh*.
Islie of Skye, Scotland.

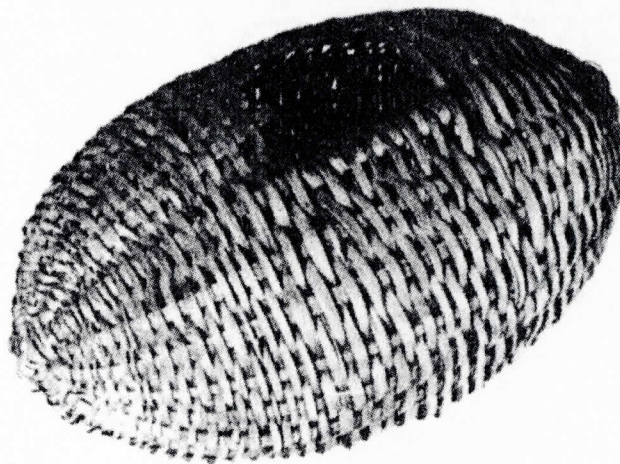


Figure 38. Appalachian *crealagh*, Ovoid gathering basket.
Pennsylvania.

German immigrant groups initially settled into the farmlands and fertile valleys of Pennsylvania, Ohio and south through the Shenandoah valley into West Virginia and Virginia. Perhaps they found the cultivation and preparation of willow too time-consuming and labor-intensive, or the native willow “unfriendly”, or perhaps they were overwhelmed by the abundance of wood in America. Most, however, eventually applied their willow traditions to the indigenous white oak for the sturdy agricultural baskets that were needed on the farm.

German immigrant groups in Appalachia pulled strips of white oak through a “die” (a steel tool with graded holes) to form round oak rods, which seemingly imitate willow rods. “There is no known precedent in Europe for making whittled or die-shaped rods for basket making” (Law and Taylor, 1991, p. 205). “It is known however that German cabinetmakers cut furniture dowels by driving short pieces of wood through a piece of steel that had several holes drilled through it, a method that will reproduce round oak rods” (Stephenson, 1977 p. 90). Baskets using round oak rods and stake and strand construction have antecedents that lie in German willow traditions (Figures 39, 40 and 26), as perhaps baskets with rib and frame construction using flat oak splints, which seemingly mimic skeined willow work (Figure 14). Therefore, rib and frame construction using white oak splits may illustrate a combination of German and British antecedents.

Jeanette Lasansky (1984) has identified round rod willow work in western Pennsylvania; John Rice Irwin (1982) has identified it in the Cumberland mountains of Tennessee; Sue Stephenson (1977) has identified round rod willow work in eastern



Figure 39. German oak rod basket. Rod basket with brown stripes. Hardy County, West Virginia.

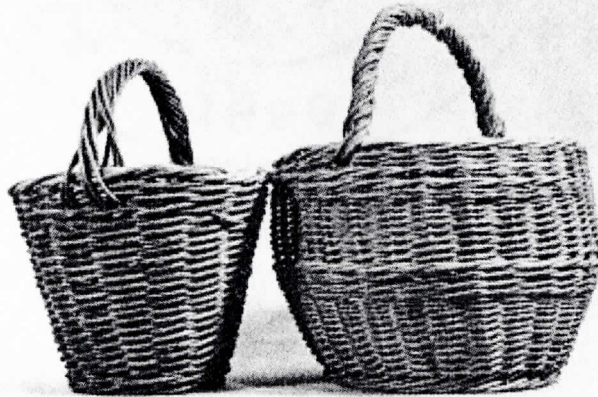


Figure 40. German oak rod baskets, "Berry or egg baskets". Pennsylvania Farms Museum of Lands County.

Virginia, and even more so in Pennsylvania and few in Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina. Law and Taylor (1991) have also identified it in the Potomac Valley of West Virginia. Rosemary Joyce has done extensive research documenting the work of one oak rod basketmaker, Dwight Stump in Hocking County, Ohio. He in turn remembered the names of more than fifty individuals who were involved in round rod work in Hocking and Fairfield counties in Ohio and talked about a whole community of oak rod basket makers who lived out on Tar Ridge, known as "basket country" (Joyce 1989, pp. 125-32, 209-211). Concentrations of oak rod basket makers are found in areas of dense German settlement.

Gypsy Traditions

Believed to have come originally from India, the Gypsies migrated to Europe during the fifteenth century and now live all over the world. Most Gypsies arrived in North America in the late nineteenth century or later. Groups such as the Tinkers in Britain and the Jenisch in Germany have nomadic lifestyles similar to that of the gypsies but have different ethnic origins. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, both Spain and Portugal shipped Gypsies to their colonies in South America. They are said to have gradually worked their way through Central America and Mexico, entering the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. Probably because of the Civil War in the East, they do not appear in the Appalachians until 1875-80.

The Shenandoah Valley during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was the great highway between the ridges of the Blue ridge and the Alleghenies. Not only was it traveled by immigrant settlers, but also by 1840, itinerant peddlers were crisscrossing it

and making side trips into the surrounding mountains. A well-known route traveled by tinsmiths and gypsies after the Civil War led from the Shenandoah Valley to the Greenbrier Valley, through the Kanawha Valley and into the Ohio Valley (Stephenson, 1911, p. 27).

Gypsies traveled throughout Pennsylvania, camped along the creeks each spring and summer and wove willow baskets. When Gypsies came through towns and camped by the creeks making plant stands, urns and fancywork in willow, word quickly spread that they were there and had baskets to be purchased (Lasansky, 1978, p. 9). In the early part of the twentieth century Gypsies were frequently seen camping in the laurel and rhododendron thickets in the mountains (Kylloe, 1993). They made rustic furniture, fern stands, and the like from the native rhododendron and willow and sold this ware in nearby towns. Interestingly, their own style evolved, and it is simply known as Gypsy willow furniture (Figure 41). Gypsy willow furniture is unique in that it is seemingly the only willow tradition that actually evolved in the Appalachian region. Therefore one might say it is the only truly “authentic” Appalachian willow work!

Gypsy groups can be attributed with picking up, building on, exchanging, blending and mixing various cultural traditions as is evident in what little Gypsy willow work that has been documented. Stephenson (1977) claims that Gypsies may have carried the Madeira style basket into Appalachia. Dorothy Wright also mentions that the cross that is found at the junction of rib and frame baskets in Appalachia (Figure 10), is hardly ever found on rib and frame baskets in Britain. According to Stephenson, in Appalachia it is known as the “Fourfold Bond” or “Christ on the Cross” Wright documents that it is also



Figure 41. Gypsy willow. Gypsy willow style done in cedar.

known as "*Ojo de Dios*," Eye of God, referring to a magical symbol used by the Huichol Indians of northwestern Mexico. Small crosses covered with brightly colored yarns and dyed grasses are made as Christmas ornaments, though they were probably originally pagan good luck symbols. They are found all over South America and the southwestern United States. It can be suggested that gypsy groups perhaps carried this symbol into the Appalachian region.

Rustic Traditions

In America, rustic furniture first gained popularity during the mid-1800's. At that time the Industrial Revolution had forced people to re-evaluate their changing lifestyles. Interest in a simple, more natural way of living was popularized through books, articles and by word of mouth. There was a burgeoning enthusiasm for places and people who appeared to retain a sense of tradition; consequently, rustic furniture evolved through the efforts of artisans who catered to the vacation and resort crowd and addressed the issues of life "in a more natural way" (Kylloe, 1993).

Many different styles of rustic developed throughout the Appalachian region. In the north, the Adirondack style used white and yellow birch, red cedar, alder and cherry. In the south, the Southern Root style, used rhododendron or laurel bushes and their roots. In Pennsylvania and Ohio bent-twist furniture was made by the Amish from willow branches and oak or sometimes maple slat seats. As mentioned earlier, the Gypsies developed their own style of rustic furniture, with huge sweeping circular backs constructed from willow trees indigenous to the southern Appalachian area (Figures 22

and 41). Gypsy families would often show up at someone's home and offer to make furniture in exchange for meals that day (Kylloe, 1993, p. 16).

Rustic furniture makers also frequently embellished their products with touches such as chip carving, also known as rustication, and intricate mosaic work (Figure 21). A common practice for rustic furniture makers was to make a few items at home, then load them onto a wagon and sell the pieces door-to-door at various resort centers throughout the southern mountain ranges. This method of marketing was used by many Gypsy families.

Revival Traditions

At the turn of the twentieth century in America, as in England, pre-industrial, traditional art forms had almost totally disappeared by 1900. Influenced by the British Arts and Crafts movement, craft revivalists intervened in indigenous cultures to redirect the production of handwork in economically depressed areas. A few years before the turn of the century influences largely from outside the region gave impetus to what may be called the beginning of a revival of handicrafts, a movement, which though faint at first, grew persistently until today.

The revival was not marked by a sudden turning of workers to handwork, but rather a gradual renewing of interest and activity in the old-time arts in different parts of the mountains simultaneously yet quite independently of one another. The earliest stirrings centered around Berea, Kentucky and Asheville, North Carolina. In time other centers were begun until eventually every state in the Appalachian region made a contribution to the handicraft development of that region (Eaton, 1937).

Sarah Hill (1997) states that New England reformers were motivated by an impulse to offer social redemption to the impoverished and came into the Southern Appalachians to open settlement houses, schools and institutes dedicated to social uplift. Arts and crafts were central to the success of these enterprises. Social reformers believed in the moral power of industry and handwork and in the social benefits of market success. Appalachia became a mission field with redeeming people and saving local traditions being the intertwined goals of these northern social reformers.

The willow work that stems from this revival has a refined, polished, ready-for-market appearance, or perhaps it would be more accurately described as having an "educated appearance" (Figures 42 and 23). Unusual forms and dyed willow suddenly appear in the willow work. Aunt Cord Ritchie, who lived a few miles from the Hindman Settlement School in Kentucky (Figure 43) seems to represent this revivalist tradition. Eaton (1973) documented her working with a golden willow, a native yellow variety, which she peeled and dyed. She claimed, however, that she was self-taught, that she had examined a basket which someone had brought from over the mountain, taken it apart and experimented with local material (Eaton, 1937, p. 171). The Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild in Asheville, North Carolina, has one of her baskets in their permanent collection (Figure 23). It seems highly unlikely that this basket was not influenced by the Southern Crafts Revival in some way. The unusual forms and dyed willow she used, as well as her close proximity to the Hindman Settlement School in Knott County, Kentucky, which was famous for its efforts to raise and keep high standards of basketry, lead to this assumption.

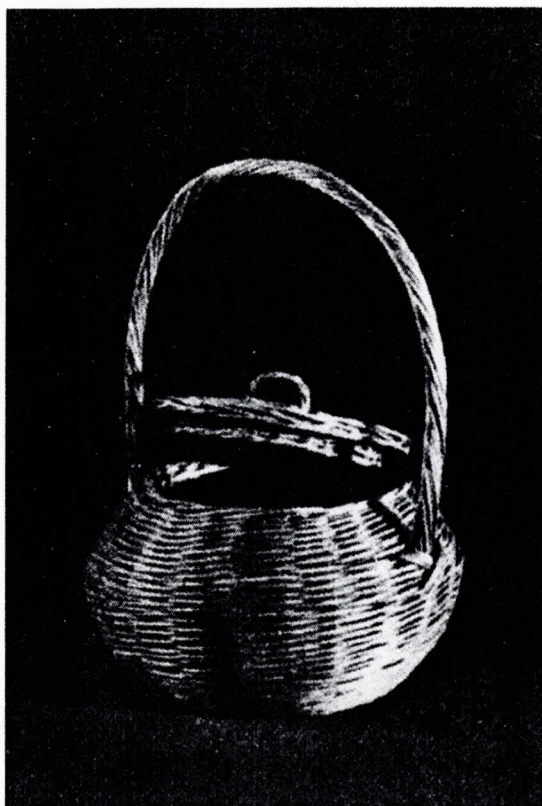


Figure 42. Revival willow work. Willow basket made at Hindman Settlement School.



Figure 43. Aunt Cord Ritchie. Aunt Cord Ritchie who lived over the mountain from the Hindman Settlement School, specialized in willow baskets.

The Cherokee Indians, in particular, were affected by this revival as is evident in their basketry. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, their basketry tradition was one of plaiting the indigenous and once-abundant river cane (Figure 8). The revival introduced the use of oak splints and honeysuckle, employing rib and frame construction (Figure 44), as well as other techniques which are characteristic of flat splint work (Figure 45).

In many ways the crafts revival continues today. Artisans are spending time uncovering and rediscovering traditional art forms. Many of the traditional art forms are not being passed on anymore ancestrally or through apprenticeships, but learned through classes and books. In many cases it is these artists who are keeping traditional art forms alive. Joyce (1989) considers this to be “interrupted” tradition and may have repercussions in the form of authenticity, as she believes ancestral transmission is imperative. At the turn of the 20th century, however, when the traditional arts were beginning to decline, William Morris could see that they would be carried forth by a small minority of educated persons who were fully conscious of their aim (Hall, 1977). This ongoing crafts movement, or revival if you will, perhaps will be the only means by which many traditional arts will be sustained.



Figure 44. Cherokee basket, oak. White oak frame and rib basket.



Figure 45. Cherokee basket, honeysuckle.

Chapter Four

Sustaining Traditions in Contemporary Appalachian Willow Work

In this chapter how the cultural and historical willow traditions identified and described in chapter three have or have not been sustained in contemporary Appalachian willow work is examined. There are two distinctive forms of willow work found in the Appalachian region: basketry and willow furniture. The goal was to locate an artisan working in each form, who was not only working with willow, but working to sustain cultural and historical willow traditions as well. Various art centers, heritage sites, arts and crafts shops, galleries, antique shops, front porches and people were identified throughout the region and contacted in an attempt to locate contemporary artisans who working with willow. The John C. Campbell Folk School, Brasstown, North Carolina; The Southern Highland Handicraft Guild, Asheville, North Carolina; Handmade in America, Asheville, North Carolina; The Western Carolina Heritage Center, Cullowhee, North Carolina; The American Willow Growers Network, Norwich, New York; The Penland School of Crafts, Penland, North Carolina; The Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts, Gatlinburg, Tennessee; and The Augusta Heritage Center, Elkins, West Virginia, were some of the contact points.

Basket makers were located in the region who were using various cultural and historical willow traditions, however, they were not using willow. Willow furniture makers were located who were using willow, but were not using cultural and historical

willow traditions that are characteristic of the region. The material/place, the artisan and the cultural and historical traditions form essential interdependent relationships which illustrate concepts of sustainability and establish a sense of place.

Bonnie Gale was the only basketmaker located who was working exclusively with willow. She sustains mainly English along with some Irish traditions, which form the basic structural components of Appalachian basketry. Nona and Herman Noblitt were the only willow furniture makers located who were using cultural and historical willow traditions. They sustain the Gypsy and Rustic traditions which, when combined, are the form of willow work developed in and unique to the Appalachian region. These artists work out of the Revival tradition as well, as they have studied and educated themselves extensively in their discipline. These artisans not only work with willow, they are actively engaged in sustaining cultural and historical willow traditions that are characteristic of the Appalachian region.

Nona and Herman Noblitt

Nona and Herman Noblitt live in Bethel, North Carolina, and have been making Gypsy willow furniture and other related items for more than twenty-five years. They both grew up south of Charlotte, North Carolina. In 1974 they decided to “leave civilization” and gave the key to their house to an auctioneer (Noblitt, personal communication, February 13, 1998). Nona said the gavel was hit 2200 times, it made the front page of the Mecklenburg Gazette, and they never went back. They have resided on the edge of the Watauga river amongst their “sticks” ever since.

They call themselves “Daddy’s Sticks” in honor of Nona’s now deceased father, Zeb Osborne, who learned the art along with them. The Noblitts decided they wanted to live simply and to work with their hands doing something they loved. It all started with a stick chair that Nona had bought. Nona said they learned their art by traveling the South “uncovering and rediscovering” Gypsy willow. They had heard there were “makers” (those who make willow furniture) in Hillsville, Virginia and Liberty, South Carolina; these were the starting points for their research. They traveled, collected, and studied throughout various other parts of Virginia and South Carolina as well as West Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. According to Herman and Nona the largest concentrations of “makers” were between Hillsville and Damascus, Virginia. They also made note of a few “makers” in Hampton, Tennessee, who were combining willow and hickory.

Traveling more than a thousand miles a week on their quest, they spent four years between 1976 and 1980 “riding the road” stopping when they saw something, offering money, or simply asking for the opportunity to study the piece they had found. They bought ninety old pieces of furniture, never took photographs, and only occasionally made a sketch. They took pieces apart, measured sizes, measured tension, and determined what worked the best; not what looked the best necessarily, but what felt the best and what functioned the best. They used sticks as measuring templates and peeled the bark off for easy identification.

They eventually had a big sale and sold all but twelve of the original pieces and lived off that money until they learned how to make furniture themselves. During the

winter of 1979-80 they sold their first chair and one table. In April of 1980 they sold their first load of furniture. All of the original pieces they collected are now housed in various private collections throughout the country. Nona showed me an old Gypsy rocker she was repairing that was very similar to one of the original pieces they had collected (Figure 46).

“We studied and researched and picked out the best arm, the best seat, the best back and combined these into our own version of a field chair” (Figure 47), (Noblitt, 1998). The original Gypsy field chairs were built quickly and literally in the field. Unlike the quick field work of the Gypsies, the Noblitts field chairs, according to Nona, have many more pieces and are built to last. They make various other chairs (Figures 48 and 49), love seats and garden benches (Figures 50 and 51), tables (Figures 52 and 53), small shelves (Figure 54), plant stands and other small willow items. The Noblitts have ventured off into their own style of gypsy willow of course (Figures 55 and 56), which includes beaver sticks (which are gnawed off pieces of wood they find in their yard), pinecones, and other natural materials.

The Gypsy traditions which the Noblitts sustain in their work are many. First and foremost the Noblitt’s style of learning their art was ironically done in a gypsy manner, riding the road, picking this up here, that up there, and incorporating many different gypsy willow traditions, from various different places, into their work. According to Nona, in the gypsy tradition, any board or slat of wood they use in their work must have had another life, meaning it must have been used before, a recycled board (Figure 56). They tear down houses and barns and scavenge from “construction destruction” (Noblitt,



Figure 46. Gypsy rocking chair.
Before 1930, Hillsville, Virginia.

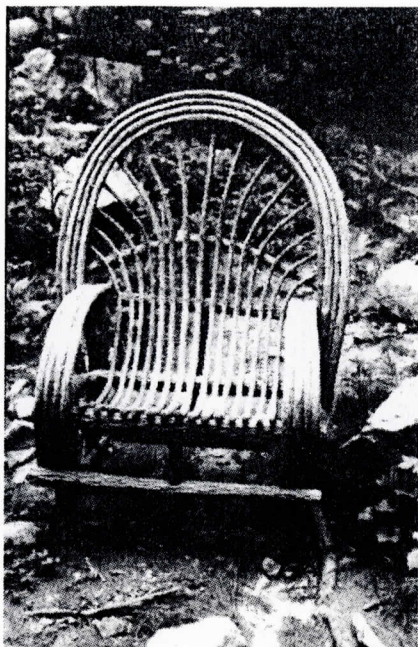


Figure 47. Field chair.
The Noblitts, 1991.



Figure 49. Small straight back chair.
The Noblitts, 1982.

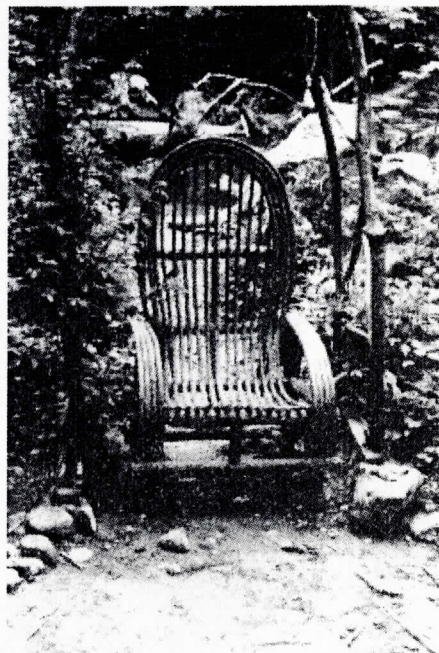


Figure 48. Tall back field chair.
The Noblitts, 1993.

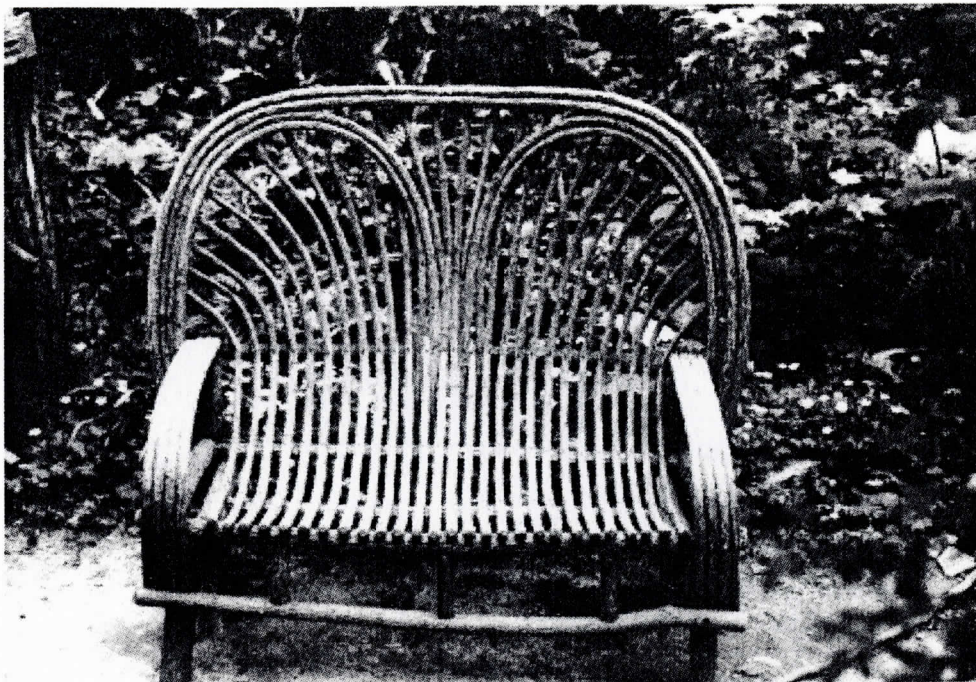


Figure 50. Sofa.
The Noblitts, 1990.

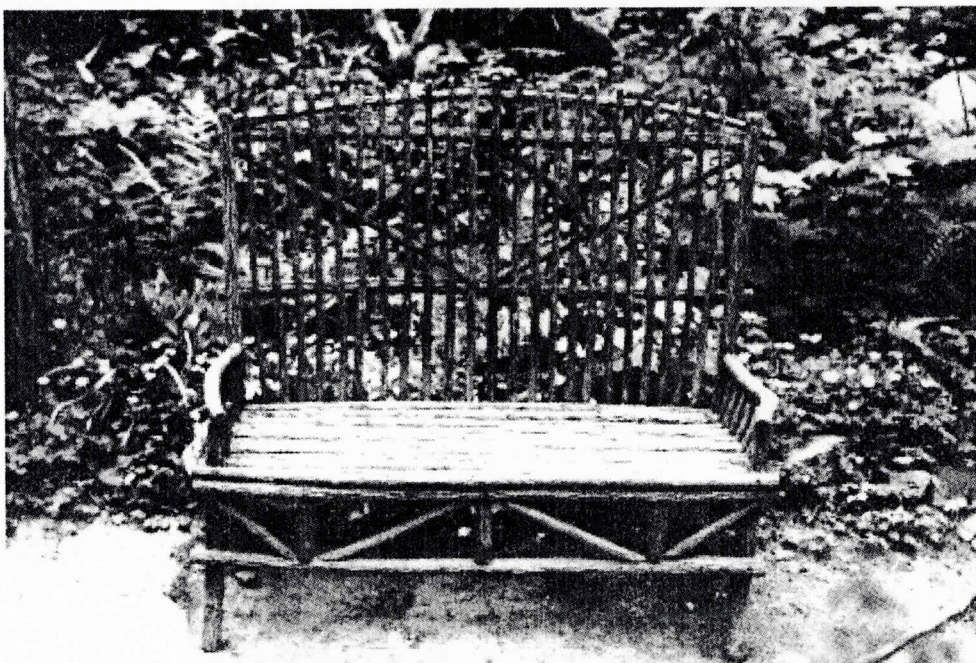


Figure 51. Garden bench.
The Noblitts, 1990.



Figure 52. Table, heart top.
The Noblitts, 1981.



Figure 53. Table, heart sides.
The Noblitts, 1981.



Figure 54. Small shelf.
The Noblitts, 1988.

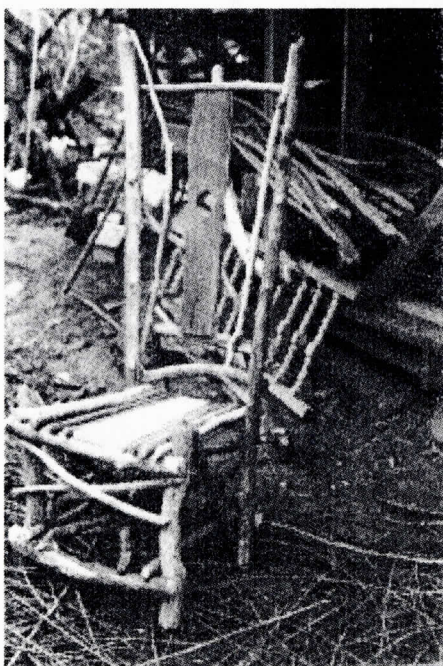


Figure 56. Chair with beaver sticks.
The Noblitts, Nov. 1997.

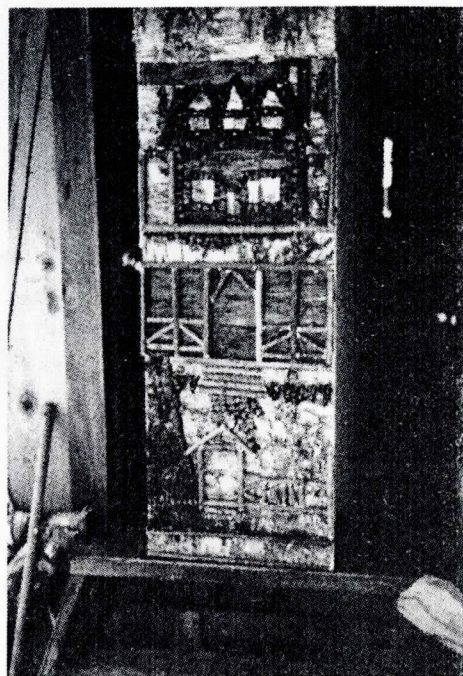


Figure 55. Dresser.
The Noblitts, June 1998.

1998). Nona feels strongly that this is a part of the Gypsy tradition since, Gypsies would arrive at someone's home and offer to make furniture in return for a meal or a place to sleep. Although in reality, what happened in many instances was that "Gypsies would go into your barn, steal wood, paint and nails, go down to the river or railroad bed, make some furniture, then show up at your door and try to sell you the furniture, made with your own wood, nails and paint (Noblitt 1998). According to Nona, often Gypsies would use the wood and nails from packing crates, apple crates, nail boxes etc., and goes on to say that the best nails used for furniture are "box" nails (four-sided nails).

Hearts were very popular in Gypsy furniture according to Nona. Not because they were cute or in vogue, but because one was assured a meal for a heart, or two meals for two hearts etc. Hearts most frequently appeared on smaller work, as they required smaller willow which was more flexible. Although sometimes they were used to form the backs of love seats, sofas or settees. The Noblitts incorporate hearts into some of their tables (Figure 52 and 53).

I asked Nona if they ever use the Rustic traditions of chip carving, sometimes called rustication, which Nona calls guilding, or mosaic work (Figure 21), which Nona calls lamination. The Noblitts do use methods of mosaic work (Figure 52); however, they do not use methods of rustication. They did have an interesting rustication story to tell me however. According to Nona, in Abingdon, Virginia, "the grandchildren (who were around 65 years of age) of an old-time maker, upon seeing our work said their grandmother died of breathing in the willow flecks" (Noblitt, 1998).

Nona commented on the difference between the willow work in the northern parts of Appalachia as opposed to that in the southern parts of Appalachia. "In the north it was small Victorian pieces, plant stands, basketry and the like, using small willow with lots of curves and detail work, in the south it was furniture, a southern version of Rustic" (Noblitt, 1998). The Noblitts are very aware of the history of the Rustic furniture tradition, and often go to Central Park in New York for inspiration. According to Nona "this is where much of American Rustic got its start, the gazebos, fences and gates were some of the first twig creations in America" (Noblitt, 1998).

Nona and Herman's life is very scheduled. They cut willow from thirty different fields on a rotating basis every ten days. They have made furniture for every landowner in return. Often the willow is seen as a nuisance and cutting is welcomed. They work from a calendar and a map, where the willow is and when the willow will be ready. All their fields are presently in South Carolina, but they originally had two in North Carolina. Nona said that one of their willow fields in North Carolina was cut down by the government below the growth line and it never came back very well. They also know of a small patch near Mountain City, Tennessee. When they go to cut, they know exactly what they need before hand: how many rods, how many benders, for all the pieces they are planning to make.

I asked Nona what types of willow they use, and she replied "black, gray and pussy willow and the old term of Gypsy willow refers to the golden gypsy willow" (Noblitt, 1998). "Willow grows crooked up here in the mountains due to cold and stormy weather. So you can only use small pieces, it's hard to find long sturdy straight pieces.

People here in the mountains did not cultivate willow, and a wild willow patch here in the mountains is now rare” (Noblitt, 1998).

When the Noblitt’s began making gypsy willow furniture twenty-five years ago, there were only about ten others making gypsy willow. Nona stated the reason as “after the Depression came the Mahogany Age and people wanted pretty furniture” (Noblitt, 1998). Nona said it took awhile for it to catch back on. On their travels collecting willow furniture, the Noblitts noticed that people were starting to covet the pieces they had, knowing it was becoming rare.

Nona said they have been invited to many magazines, newspapers and historical societies, and, pictures of their work have been published about twenty times under the names of their dealers. They enjoy their privacy and lifestyle however, and therefore choose to keep a low profile. Gypsy willow evolved out of the Rustic furniture movement primarily in Southern Appalachia, where seemingly the willow was naturally more abundant. Willow naturally lent itself to this form of manipulation with its ability to bend and be shaped. It is a uniquely Appalachian form of willow work.

Bonnie Gale

Bonnie Gale lives in Norwich, New York. She has been a professional willow basket maker for twelve years. A Kennedy Scholar in London, England with degrees from the University of Manchester, and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Massachusetts, she has trained with several professional European willow basket makers including Mary Butcher. She has studied willow growing during various trips to Europe, and is the proprietor of “English Basketry Willows” a small business selling imported

European basketry willows, willow basketry books and tools. In 1988 founded the "American Willow Growers Network" which promotes the growing and exploration of willow and its uses. She cultivates about a half acre of approximately fifteen varieties (the varieties change every yearly due to USDA regulations) of specimen willows, of which she sells cuttings every spring.

She teaches traditional willow basketry at major conventions and guilds across the United States. She also sponsors European willow workers to come to the United States and teach. She writes extensively on traditional basketry and willow growing, and her articles have appeared in *Early American Life Magazine*, *Basket Bits*, *Basketry Express* and other assorted basketry publications. Her work has been shown in major basketry exhibitions and she has been the recipient of numerous awards.

Bonnie Gale works out of a revivalist tradition because she has been educated extensively in the art of traditional willow basketry, it is an acquired skill, and her work has a very polished, refined appearance. She also works mainly out of English willow traditions, using stake and stand construction techniques as well as steam peeled willows and leather embellishments. However, some of her work has been influenced by Irish tradition in forms such as the creel and sciob and rib and frame construction techniques as in the sciob.

Bonnie Gale is an English immigrant herself, and it seems that her interest in willow began out on the west coast in Seattle, Washington, when Shereen Laplantz, Michelle Berk and other like-minded individuals began bringing basketry back into vogue in the 1980's. Bonnie stated that "there was a whole movement on the west coast

dedicated to revitalizing basketry, many were working with reed and other fibers, but I was drawn to willow” (Gale, personal communication, February 20, 1998).

After moving back to the east coast she became aware that there had been a profusion of traditional willow basketry in nineteenth century eastern and Midwestern United States. Because the willow legacy of Liverpool, New York and the fact that the old-time immigrant basket makers and their descendants had almost passed away, Bonnie became dedicated to keeping their traditions alive. She studied with Frank Selinsky of Eaton, New York, whom she claims is the last descendant of the Liverpool, New York basketmaker's. Bonnie informed me that even though it may have been the English who initially settled into Liverpool, New York, many different immigrant groups, including German and Polish basket makers, settled into the area to work at the “salt works.” In the winter when the works closed they would make baskets. Many had willow patches behind their homes, and workshops as well. In fact, in 1994, Liverpool residents turned a former workshop into a Museum in hopes of preserving the town's unique heritage (Gale, 1998). Bonnie now has plans to make a Liverpool, New York, series of willow baskets and hopes to reproduce many of the baskets that were made at that time. She is now making her first, which is a sewing basket (Figure 57).

Bonnie Gale is also known for her willow and leather series (she does her own leather work, which is an English tradition) which includes a fishing creel (Figure 58), a willow back-pack (Figure 59) and camera basket, all with leather straps and brass hardware. She also does a lot of custom willow work including anything from square willow baskets for designer kitchens, to baby bassinets. Other items she makes are the

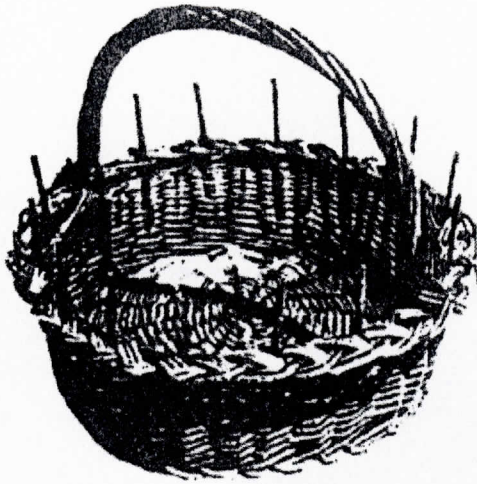


Figure 57. Sewing basket.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.



Figure 58. Creel.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.

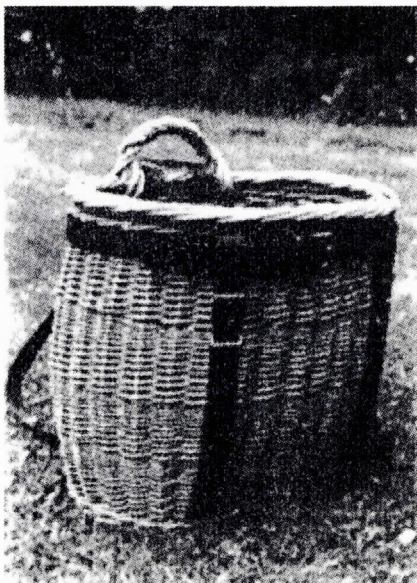


Figure 59. Back pack.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.

Irish sciob, or potato basket (Figure 60), a spoon basket, a crochan, which is an oval arm basket (Figure 61), a square shopper (Figure 62), a lunch basket, a fireside basket, a square provision basket, a bushel basket, a laundry basket, a wall basket, roll baskets (Figure 63), baby rattles and skeined willow jewelry. Bonnie uses mainly imported English willows in her work, except for her spoon basket and the sciob in which she uses her own colorful unpeeled willows.

When asking Bonnie about specific traditions that could be attributed to English willow work she said “most square willow work can be attributed to the English. Bonnie also made a distinction between English willow work and Continental (European) willow work. Without elaborating she quickly stated the main distinctions in willow work were those of construction types, being rib and frame or stake and stand (Gale, 1998).

Each of these artisans is dedicated to the preservation of the traditions they sustain in their work. Along with these traditions, comes the knowledge of the people, the places, and the accompanying history which all become an integral part of the tradition itself. Willow work is a traditional art form that when studied carefully can teach us much about the culture and history of the Appalachian region. Not only is cultural history revealed, it is preserved in the work itself. Willow work becomes much more than a basket or a piece of furniture, it becomes a visual manifestation of a place, sustaining traditions that can provide a sense of place.

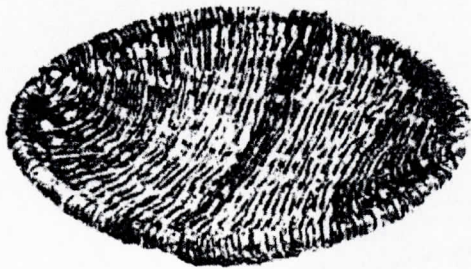


Figure 60. Sciob.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.



Figure 61. Crochan.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.



Figure 62. Square shopper.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.



Figure 63. Rolls basket.
Bonnie Gale, 1990's.

Chapter Five

Conclusions and Implications for Art Education

The traditional art form of willow work has been found in various places throughout the world, including the Appalachian region. Although the willow plant, from which willow work is made, is indigenous to Appalachia, evidence of its use to create aesthetically-pleasing traditional art objects does not appear until European immigrant groups began to settle into the region. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as various western European cultural groups settled in Appalachia, they brought with them the willow traditions from their native European countries. Many of these cultural traditions have been identified in chapters three, and four, although perhaps modified throughout changing historical contexts. In some instances, these traditions have yielded a uniquely Appalachian style of willow work. Many of these modified traditions continue to be identified in the willow work of contemporary Appalachian artisans such as Herman and Nona Noblitt and Bonnie Gale.

Understanding and appreciating traditional art forms, such as Appalachian willow work, can develop concepts of sustainability and help to re-establish the lost sense of place that is characteristic of postmodern culture. A sense of place results from a sustainable, interdependent relationship with the earth. One way to attain this relationship is through interacting with the earth's natural resources when creating art. Willow work is a traditional art form that illustrates how interdependent relationships between materials,

artisan, traditions in process, form and function can re-establish a sense of place and develop concepts of sustainability.

Willow work promotes sustainability because it is a natural plant material that thrives on being harvested and replenishes itself readily. It hybridizes naturally and adapts easily to many different environments. It epitomizes the definition of sustainability. It does not require harmful chemicals for its growth, nor industrial, oil-consuming machinery for cultivation or processing. Willow work requires a hands-on interdependent relationship between the material and the artisan in processing and methods of manipulation.

We live in a world where just about all the objects we use in our everyday lives are manufactured from oil-based derivatives which in turn have destructive effects on the environment, not to mention on the livelihoods of the many artisans that are obliterated with mass-produced factory-made objects. The fact that contemporary society (for the most part) accepts and uses (usually without a conscious questioning) industrially-produced items reflects the changing economic, social and aesthetic values that have accompanied industrial society. Consciously choosing to acquire and use handmade objects instead of industrially-produced items reflects a sustainable understanding of the world and one's place within it, as well as the impact one's choices have on the environment. Willow work can be used for a variety of purposes which reflect sustainable lifestyle choices, while at the same time providing quality, sustainable work for the artisan.

Working with willow provides a sense of place for the artisan, as an artisan: a personal sense of place, a place in his or her community, country and the world. The traditional artisan finds a place as a bearer of tradition, in form, function, process and technique. The material reflects places, and the traditions reflect places. Willow work illustrates how various cultural traditions can merge to create objects that are aesthetically pleasing and sustainable while at the same time reflecting a multilayered sense of place.

The traditional artisan links one place to another by sustaining traditions and developing interdependent relationships among them, for example: the Appalachian Gizzard basket (Figure 14), reflects a form and construction technique used by the English and Irish, a method of material manipulation used by the German, and uses the indigenous white oak to create an Appalachian basket. The interconnectedness and interdependence of cultural traditions which are illustrated in Appalachian willow work reflect the interconnectedness and interdependence of the earth's cultures and ecological systems. Many traditions in process, form and function are united and interdependent in Appalachian willow work. These cultural differences are dependant one upon the other as they unite and fuse to create something new. Perhaps cultural divisions and prejudices that are unfortunately characteristic of contemporary culture can be better understood and appreciated as they unite in traditional art forms such as Appalachian willow work.

Cultural pluralism manifests itself in Appalachian willow work as distinct traditions unite and fuse. Appalachian willow work is pluralistic. It is varying combinations of English, Irish, German, Gypsy, Scotch, Gypsy, rustic and revival traditions. Traditional art forms such as Appalachian willow work can enable us to develop multiple

perspectives, where distinctions and differences are celebrated and serve a unifying purpose rather than one where differences are magnified and isolated.

Creative people from various disciplines and nationalities gathered to investigate willow at New Forms in Willow, an international conference held in July 1991, at the Ness Botanical Gardens of the University of Liverpool in Wirral, Cheshire (northwestern) England (Figure 64). Traditions and innovations in contemporary basket making, environmental art, green engineering, and new contexts for public art were conference topics of discussion. Farmers, economists, foresters, members of the English Crafts Council, state and local arts activists joined the group and explored political, social, and economic uses of willow (Gale, 1991). Communication among a number of disparate disciplines involving the use of willow illustrates how willow can serve as a common ground for developing concepts of sustainability and a global sense of place.

Educating for an ecologically sustainable culture should be a goal for all educators. The destruction that has been done to the earth, including plants, animals, cultures, humans, air, water and soil, cannot be ignored. Many art educators advocate teaching philosophies that help individuals to think about the relationship of art, ecology, and daily life (Blandy & Cowan, 1977; Hollis, 1997; Lankford, 1997; Neperud, 1997; Stankiewicz, 1997). By studying, understanding and creating traditional art forms we can develop concepts of sustainability and re-establish our lost sense of place, which in essence is the relationships between art, ecology and daily life. As we study the "old ways" of culture, traditions and the ties that bind us together as families, communities, countries, perhaps we are exploring what Suzi Gablik refers to as "connective aesthetics" art which speaks to the



Figure 64. "Twiggy's Come Back," woven willow figure.
Serena de la Hay, 1995, England.

power of connectedness and established bonds, art that calls us into relationship (Gablik, 1991, p. 114).

Connections between art and life are essential components of a contemporary art curriculum whose goals aim at ecological sustainability. One of the content areas of the National Art Education Association's research agenda is labeled "contexts," that is, research about situations in which teaching and learning occurs, about environments, cultures, and histories (Congdon, 1996, p. 53). Blandy and Hoffman (1993) proposed that art education should include concepts of place and described learning environments sensitive to practices that promote the sustainability of the environment and attend to the concept of community as place. Students are encouraged to explore the historical and human contexts of their own communities. When a curriculum offers a sense of purpose, relevance and pertinence, as does studying local places, students are more likely to integrate educational experiences into their own schemes of meaning, which in turn broadens and deepens their understanding of themselves and the world. Both John Dewey (1897) and Lewis Mumford (1946) strongly advocated the importance of place in pedagogy. They could see that in the reciprocity between thinking and doing, knowledge loses much of its abstractness when applied to specific places and problems. When learning includes relevant contextual concerns, concepts of sustainability and a sense of place can be established.

Appalachian willow work is a traditional art form that develops a sense of place, especially for students in the Appalachian region. It gives learning a historical and cultural context, which can provide a sense of community, and a place within that community for

the individual. Students can take pride in their regional traditions, which in turn validates themselves and their place (community). When studying a traditional art form such as Appalachian willow work, students are provided with an opportunity to experience art as an integral part of life, as they should when being educated for ecological sustainability.

Similar in many ways, William Morris, English proponent of the turn of the twentieth-century Arts and Crafts Movement, saw the social and psychological implications of mass production as well as their external effects on the environment. The Arts and Crafts Movement began as a campaign for social, industrial and aesthetic reform. In a little over a generation, industry outgrew its earlier promise as a source of rejuvenation and vitality, a tool that was supposed to unite and improve mankind. Instead, it became a negative force that stultified the artisan and that was seen as a threat to England's culture, security and traditions. The cost of mechanical "progress" in terms of human misery, degradation, and the destruction of fundamental human values was reflected in poverty, overcrowded slums, grim factories, and a dying countryside. William Morris believed that "the root of social evil, in his day, was to be found in the separation of work from joy, and of art from craft (Osborne, 1968, p. 44)." He therefore repudiated the idea of "fine art" as a thing apart in the category of luxury articles and defined art as the expression of one's joy in one's labor. Morris made it his life's endeavor to introduce the ideal of universal craftsmanship, insisting that aesthetic activity should coexist with the whole of one's life (Osborne, 1968).

In traditional cultures around the world there is little concept of art as an ideal held apart from society, unlike our western notions of fine art. Rather, objects were and are

shaped and decorated with great care because they already had or have a firm place in the community. Conversely, Western fine art is often a detached, cognitively-mediated “appreciation” of compositional relationships; its place in history and tradition, and its implications and ramifications are outside the “the aesthetic experience” (Dissanyake, 1988). Appalachian willow work is a traditional art form that reflects how art can be intertwined with daily life in many different ways, as it develops concepts of sustainability and establishes a sense of place.

In a re-constructivist stance, art education is explicitly placed in the service of social transformation, with a restructuring of commonly held assumptions about what constitutes art and education. An expanded definition of aesthetics is becoming increasingly imperative if humankind is to survive into the twenty-first century. Educating for a sustainable world will require a new understanding of the arts and their “place” in an ecologically sustainable world.

Traditional art forms, such as Appalachian willow work, enables us to embrace our past, present and future relationship with the earth. Developing concepts of sustainability and a sense of place should be common ground for all educators.

Reference List

- Askin, E. (1969). *The Aesthetic Movement Preludes to Art Nouveau*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger.
- Audubon Society. (1980). *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Trees, Eastern Region*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Berry, Thomas. (1988). *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club.
- Berry, Wendell. (1981). *The Gift of Good Land*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- Berson, Robert. (1987). "Why Art is Neither Socially Relevant Nor Culturally Democratic: A Contextual Analysis." In Doug Blandy & Kristen G. Congdon (Eds.), *Art in a Democracy* (pp. 81-90). New York: Teacher's College, Columbia University.
- Blandy, Doug and David Cowan. (1997). "Imagine Yellowstone: Art Education and the Reinhabitation of Place." *Art Education*, 50 (6), 47-53.
- Bloemink, Barbara J. (Jan/Feb 1992). "Discovering New Forms in Willow". *Fiberarts* 18, 18-27.
- Bookout, Timmy Joe. (1987). "Traditional Basket makers in the Southeastern and South Central United States." (Doctoral Dissertation, Florida State University, 1987). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 48-02A, 288, 00275.
- Bowers, C. A. (1995). *Educating for an Ecologically Sustainable Culture*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Brown, Lester R., Michael Renner and Christopher Flavin. (1997). *Vital Signs 1997, the Environmental Trends That Are Shaping Our Future*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Butcher, Mary. (1986). *Willow Work*. London: Dryad Press Ltd.
- Campbell, John C. (1921). *The Southern Highlander and His Homeland*. Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky.
- Couch, Osma Palmer. (1947). *Basket Pioneering*. New York: Orange Judd Publishing.

- Dewey, John. (1981). "The School and Social Progress." In J. McDermott (Ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (p. 457). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Dissanayake, Ellen. (1988). *What Is Art For*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.
- Eaton, Allen H. (1973). *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*. New York: Dover.
- Gablik, Suzi. (1991). *The Reenchantment of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Gale, Bonnie. (1991). "The New Forms in Willow International Conference." *American Willow Growers Network*, 3, 9-14.
- Gookin, Daniel. (1806). 1792, *Historical Collections of The Indians in New England*. Boston: Belknap and Hall.
- Gordon, Joleen. (1984). *With Baskets, Traps and Brooms, Traditional Crafts in Nova Scotia*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Nova Scotia Museum.
- Hall, Julie. (1977). *Tradition and Change, the New American Craftsman*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Hopf, Carroll J. (1965). "A Survey of the Types of Basketware Used on the Farm From the Colonial Period to 1860." Unpublished master's thesis, Oneonta, New York: State University of New York College at Oneonta.
- Heseltine Alastair. (1982). *Baskets and Basket making*. London: Shire Publications Ltd.
- Hollis, Cynthia L. (1997). "On Developing an Art and Ecology Curriculum". *Art Education*, 50 (6), 21-24.
- Irwin, John Rice. (1982). *Baskets and Basket makers in Southern Appalachia*. Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Jagodzinski, Jan J. (1987). "Toward an Ecological Aesthetic: Notes on a Green Frame of Mind". In Doug Blandy & Kristen G. Congdon (Eds.), *Art in a Democracy* (pp. 138-163). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Johnson, Geraldine Niva. (1980). "Rag Rugs and Rug Makers of Western Maryland: A Study of Craft in Community." (Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland College Park, 1980). *Dissertation Abstracts International*, Vol. 41-08A, 3683, 00433.

- Joyce, Rosemary O. (1989). *A Bearer of Tradition. Dwight Stump, Basketmaker*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.
- Kinmonth, Claudia. (1993). *Irish Country Furniture 1700-1950*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Knock, A.G. (1953). *Willow Basket-Work*. Leicester: The Dryad Press.
- Kowalchik, Claire and William H. Hylton, (Eds.). *Rodale's Illustrated Encyclopedia of Herbs*. (1987). Emmanus, PA: Rodale Press.
- Kylloe, Ralph. (1993). *Rustic Traditions*. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith.
- Kylloe, Ralph. (1995). *Rustic Furniture Makers*. Salt Lake City, UT: Gibbs-Smith.
- Lamb, George N. (1914). *Basket Willow Culture*. U.S. Department of Agriculture Farmer's Bulletin, Dec. 1-32.
- Lankford, Louis E. (1997). "Ecological Stewardship in Art Education." *Art Education*, 50 (6), 47-53.
- Lasansky, Jeannette. (1978). *Willow, Oak and Rye, Basket Traditions in Pennsylvania*. University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Law, Rachael Nash & Taylor, Cynthia W. (1991) *Appalachian White Oak Basket making, Handing Down the Basket*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Lippard, Lucy. (1997). *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*. New York: The New Press.
- Lopez, Barry. (1989). *The Crossing of Open Ground*. New York: Vintage.
- McHugh and James Lazear Eds. (1966). *Wicker Furniture*. Glen, NY: Century House, Watkins.
- Mumford, Lewis. (1946). *Values for Survival*. New York: Harcourt, Brace.
- O'Dowd, A. (1986). Shaw-Smith, David. "Baskets." In D. Shaw-Smith (Ed.), *Ireland's Traditional Crafts* (pp.118-129). London: Thames and Hudson Ltd.
- Orr, David W. (1992) *Ecological Literacy, Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*. New York: State University of New York Press.

- Osborne, H. (1968). *Aesthetics and Art Theory: An Historical Introduction*. New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Peterson, James B. (Ed.). (1984). *A Most Indispensable Art: Native Fiber Industries From Eastern North America*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee Press.
- Raitz, Karl B., Ulack, Richard with Leinbach, Thomas R. (1984). *Appalachia: A Regional Geography Land, People, and Development*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Ruoff, Abby. (1991). *Making Twig Furniture and Household Things*. Point Roberts, WA: Hartley and Marks.
- Schanz, Joanna E. (1986). *Willow Basketry of the Amana Colonies*. Joanna E. Schanz. West Amana, IA: The Schanz Broom and Basket Shop.
- Seymour, John. (1984). *The Forgotten Crafts: A Practical Guide to Traditional Skills*. London: Dorling Kinderley Limited.
- Stankiewicz, Mary Ann. (1997). "Art and ecology." *Art Education*, 50 (6), 4-5.
- Stephenson, Sue H. (1977). *Basketry of the Appalachian Mountains*. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold.
- Stickley, Gustave. (1915). "The Green Willow Garland: The Source of Mammoth New American Industry." *The Craftsman*, Oct.
- Verdet-Fierz, Bernard and Regula. (1993). *Willow Basketry*. Loveland, CO: Interweave Press.
- Wade, Edwin L., Carol Haralson and Rennard Strickland. (1983). *As in a Vision: Masterworks of American Indian Art*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.
- Will, Christoph. (1985). *International Basketry for Weavers and Collectors*. Exton, PA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
- Wright, Dorothy. (1983). *The Complete Book of Baskets and Basketry*. London: David and Charles, Newton Abbot.

VITA

Charlene Gay Trestain was born in Fort Campbell, Kentucky on June 16, 1953. She graduated from Stevenson High School in Livonia, Michigan in 1971. In 1975 she graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts and teacher certification from Eastern Michigan University. In 1987 she graduated from Appalachian State University with a Master of Arts in Appalachian Studies. She has been employed by the Avery County Board of Education as an art teacher since 1989.

The author is a member of The American Crafts Council, The Michigan Guild of Artists and Artisans and The National and North Carolina Art Education Associations. She maintains a weaving studio in Boone, North Carolina. Her parents are the late Jack A. Trestain and Barbara J. Trestain of Whitmore Lake Michigan. She is married to Dennis M. Scanlin and resides with her husband and daughter, Maura Shawn, on Georges Gap, in Vilas, North Carolina.