

BASKETRY HAPPENINGS

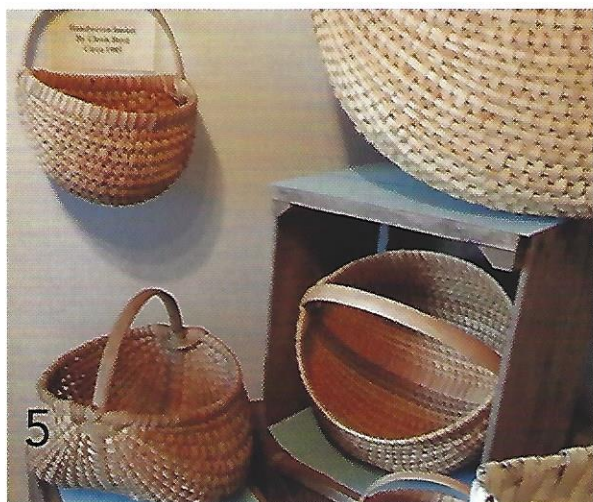
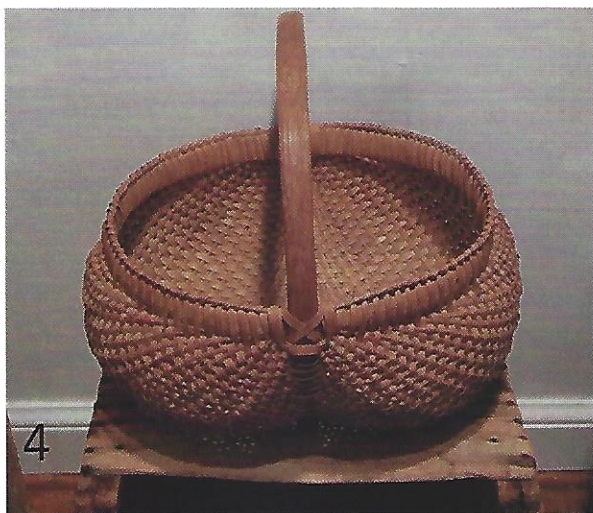


- 1 | John Harter made coiled baskets from straw with carved oak handles and oak feet. It is believed that he used a cow's horn to funnel the straw into a coil.
- 2 | This basket is thought to have been used for harvesting tobacco.
- 3 | View of the Gallery's main room. Charlie Hylton's and Iowa Griffith Cockran Haynes's baskets are shown.
- 4 | A white oak hen basket made by Charlie Hylton.
- 5 | A collection of baskets made by Clovis Boyd, who learned to make baskets from his father. He made hen's baskets from white oak saplings, selling the two-gallon size (bottom left) for \$1.50.
- 6 | Iowa Griffith Cockran Haynes often decorated her baskets with painted designs and made her own brushes out of birch twigs. The three baskets on the middle shelf were purchased for three sisters with the largest going to the oldest and smallest to the youngest.
- 7 | Detail of one of Iowa Griffith Cockran Haynes's hand-painted baskets.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO CARRY? FUNCTIONALITY & FLOYD COUNTY HERITAGE BASKETS EXHIBIT

BY CAROL PATCH





After finishing a basket, I sometimes wonder about its future. Will it carry fresh vegetables from the farmer's market or be used for picnicking? After that, will it become part of a family's history? The exhibit at The Old Church Gallery in Floyd, Virginia, is composed of functional baskets that not only have become treasured family objects but are also used to convey family and community history. The exhibit highlights selected works from Floyd County basket makers born more than a century ago, revealing details about the lives and craftsmanship of the maker at the same time.

Handcrafted baskets in this exhibit were used in everyday life—to carry a picnic supper, bring food to a family who had lost a loved one, transport small livestock or produce to market, or even cradle a child while the mother worked nearby. That many of these baskets lasted from the 19th century into the 21st—many passed down over the generations—is a testament to their workmanship and value as objects.

We know from this exhibit that John Harter (1825–1909) was injured fighting in the Civil War, from which he eventually lost a leg. When he returned home he supplemented the family income by making furniture, weaving chair bottoms, and making baskets out of coiled straw. It is believed that he used a cow's horn to funnel the straw into the coil.

Clovis Boyd (1912–1988) learned to make baskets from his father. Among other items, he made hens' baskets from white oak saplings, selling the two-gallon size for \$1.50. His primary tool was a sharp knife; he even used it with a piece of leather as a plane. By 1980, now retired from construction work, Boyd began to exhibit and sell baskets at fairs including the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee.

Charlie Hylton (1862–1951) made chairs, furniture, and white oak baskets. His baskets were known for their symmetrical shape and the secondary rim he added for strength and style. His hen baskets, still in the possession of his descendants, carry evidence of their utilitarian history—a bit of chicken poo or tiny feathers.

Iowa Griffith Cockran Haynes (1869–1964) made three baskets of graduated sizes which were purchased for three sisters; the sisters kept these baskets for their entire lives. Another small basket, made for a neighbor's daughter, was used to take the girl's lunch to school. To make her baskets more special for the owner, Haynes often painted her work with paintbrushes she made by splitting the ends of birch twigs.

The Old Church Gallery website describes the theme of the *What Do We Need to Carry?* exhibit:

"... these universal and humble containers have such warmth and beauty woven into them. Warmth of wood and fiber reaches into our hearts and brings forth our memories of baskets filled with harvest. Plastic buckets may be more watertight but handmade wooden baskets with their ribs, ears, and spines speak to us as old friends. Stains in the bottom of a basket remind us of August days spent picking blackberries."

My thanks to Catherine Pauley, Alice Slusher, and Clara Martin for the generous gift of their time in bringing together and making this exhibit available. The exhibit runs until mid-December, 2018. For more information on the Old Church Gallery and this exhibit, visit <http://oldchurchgallery.org>.

Carol Patch is retired from 35 years in the disaster recovery and IT development for the American Red Cross. She also has worked with the quilt group, Cabin Creek Quilts in West Virginia, and she co-founded Interfaith Flood