



Photo: Courtesy Clara Gough

When Clara Clayton Gough's mother, renowned artisan Edith Clayton, died, she knew that Clara would carry on the basket-weaving tradition that had been passed from mother to daughter for seven generations in Nova Scotia, and for countless generations before that in the American colonies and Africa. Although Clara felt unable to weave for a year after her mother's death in 1989, by 1990 she recalls, "I realized it was my turn."¹

Clara learned basket-making from her mother and her grandmother, Selena Drummond. Even as a young child she went to the Halifax market to help them sell baskets and run errands. One market day when Clara was eight, her grandmother "set up a basket for her" to weave; a customer admired Clara's basket and her grand-

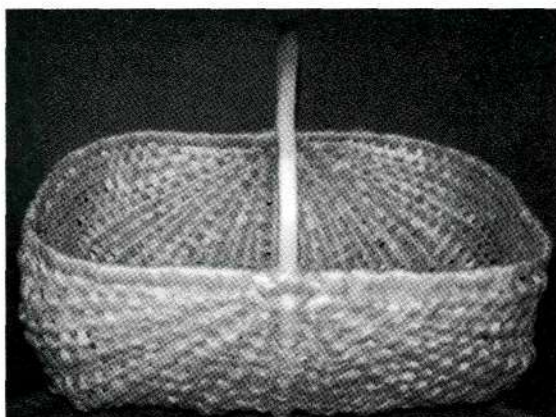
mother sold it for three dollars. She recalls "I cried for that basket" but was convinced to "continue on and learn the weaving of the baskets."² And carry on she has. Clara is a sought-after basket maker, producing market baskets, cradles, and cornucopias and giving numerous workshops in Nova Scotia and elsewhere. Seeking new ways to use her skills, Clara has adopted traditional basket-weaving techniques to create sculptures. Her "Basket Figure" was woven in 1998 in honour of her father; the woven wood man is holding red maple wood in one hand and a basket in the other. She recently completed a woman holding a baby, also using the woven wood technique.³

Clara, who lives in East Preston, is active in her church, making and repairing collection baskets, participating in women's groups and, for over 25 years, teaching Sunday School. She raised seven children and worked for a number of years in Halifax, all the while making baskets and going to market with her mother. Clara's personal collection has baskets by her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. She is featured in a new DVD, *From These Roots: Taking Up the Basket*, that celebrates the heritage of Black basket making in Nova Scotia. A younger member of Clara's family has expressed an interest in basket making, carrying on the centuries-old family tradition that was brought from Africa and has endured through slavery.⁴



Clara Clayton Gough harvesting red maple at her wood lot.

Red maple, a plentiful tree in Nova Scotia, is harvested using sustainable methods. Clara uses a hatchet and a saw to cut pieces no bigger than one to two inches in diameter. The best wood is “straight, with no side branches and few knots.”¹ After cutting, Clara takes the wood home and stores it outside, in the shade, until she needs it for her basket making. She splits a branch into suitably sized pieces using a heavy hunter’s knife and a smaller, lighter jackknife. Once the wood begins to split, the knife is used to guide the natural split in the wood.²



Photos: Clara Clayton Gough

Large market basket made by Clara Clayton Gough in 2000.