

Interview Log

Interviewee: Day's Basket Company

Tape #: MAAF/KF/MD/FT8.17.225/318

Interviewer: Kelly Feltault **# of Tapes:** 1 of 1

Date: 8/17/98 **# of Sides:** 2

Location: North East MD, Cecil County; in the factory

Topic: basket making; factory history; issues facing company

Corresponding Photography Log #: MAAF/KF/MD/PS8.17.359-370;
MAAF/KF/MD/PP8.17.367-377

Comments: File name: mdft225.doc. *Italics* indicate song title or emphasis; "quotations" indicate direct transcription; [brackets indicate additional information not on tape]. See FN08.17.98 for more details.

Mrs. Foard introduced us to Day's Baskets on May 20, 1998 [see FN05.20.98] and I tried to make appointments with Bob Friedrich the owner prior to this date. But their wood supply was ruined because of the moist spring and they had a slow spring and early summer. He said it would be better to come when the wood supply was more steady and they were working regularly. There is background noise to this tape as it was recorded inside the factory while people worked.

BEGIN SIDE A

Employees: Pamela Sargeant [PS]; Bob Friedrich [BF]; Karen Jackson [KJ]; Robert [R]

PS: worked here 12 years; sister-in-law with company then; been here ever since [Pam is making the bases for smaller baskets, you can hear her weaving and Karen's tightening process in the background]; making a square bottom for a fruit basket; the split stem always underneath; bending some stems to check for brittle ones that you can't use; you can tell to look at it where and if it's going to break;

I" thing to learn was weaving; did that for 2 years then moved into other things; prefers to make the larger round baskets; easier to weave, stems have more of a gap;

[stems: these are the wider splits used for the bottoms which are woven flat on a board with the dimensions marked out in nails. Stems must be long enough to reach the top of the basket when the bottom is folded/molded into its form]

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most important thing for making a bottom is to always check for breaking points; must be strong because must sit for a day and then if breaks while Karen is weaving it's a waste;

when working with Robert to do the splitting must check the wood; let him know when it's out of grain or brittle; [earlier PS and R were splitting oak on the splitter]

trained by several people; from North East; [breaking some of the stems to show me brittleness, hear crunching of stems and snapping]; it's out of grain; they are trash;

[long pause as PS weaves bottoms; K banging in background]; stems all bad now must cut new ones;

[pause tape]

BF: wood types; oak from lower eastern shore not as high a quality as upper shore and southern PA; changed suppliers; gets wood in every 3 weeks, gets 3 logs cut up; gets better utilization from wood now; new steam box also saving them; improvement in wood; better thorough steam; holds steam better; box built by BF, PS and K;

[saw gets turned on]

built in one day; had just an idea of what wanted; got a few ideas from wood working magazines; similar to what had in old factory; describes steamer prior to this one; plastic and didn't work;

moved in here 3 years ago, moved all equipment; some are original; stripping machine at least 30 or 40; 4 location for factory; this location is more on the beaten track; used to sell baskets whole sale but now it's retail sales; needed to be more visible to current consumer;

layout more efficient; fall is the busy time of the retail sales; having people visit the factory is good because can see what actually goes into a basket; and why baskets are expensive;

how he got into the business; used to work in the rubber business; more concerned with quality than quantity; quality defined: strong, durable and look nice; "best made baskets in the country" have life-time guarantee, don't want too many of them back; OH Longerburger baskets only give 90 day baskets; today's Day basket is best they've ever made; more quality conscious because of market; uses brass instead of steel now; rivets are copper; no stain marks;

at one time baskets sold to Campbell soup for picking baskets; quality could be lower for that; employees not this quiet usually; mostly joke around but want to impress you as hard workers today;

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steps wood has to go through; rough sawn board cut in half, planed to thickness to take off, then steamed then to stripping bench; already got a fair amount of time and labor in the wood by time they get to see if its any good or not; inside hoops are cut on a saw, don't know why; [asks PS]

PS: cause they're stiffer and holds basket shape better; that's what she always thought; handles are sawn for better finish;

BF: describes rhythm of making basket; waiting to let them dry; between each section; extra step in bigger baskets; woven one day tbut no hoops put on it; allowed to dry because of shrinkage; smaller baskets doesn't matter about shrinking; round basket bottoms more interesting;

Explains large basket construction and weaving; done on wheel; large hump in middle; yoked baskets; finishing steps for extra strength; part of older advertising was that these baskets were strong enough to stand on; used to carry fire wood;

Branding name into baskets and weavers sign bottoms with date; tradition of the company; some people want to get a particular month for special occasions like birthdays etc; or some people like a certain weaver; shows pride of workmanship that you put your name on it; not anonymous here

[move over to Karen]

KJ: [quiet little voice] doing outside hoop after weaving it; been here 11 months; saw an add in paper; likes making things; steps after putting on outside hoop; finishing steps; grinding; hand sanding; then ready for finishing: handles, yokes etc., staining

Stains: no idea how it is mixed, big stain tank; learned to weave first from PS; trained by PS; [drill on]

Building up hand and arm strength; used to go home with cuts and sore hands during first months; now has calluses; wetting the fill [the strips used to weave the sides] makes it easier; [hammering in copper tacks]

[after the weaving of fill for the sides the whole thing is held together by an outside hoop that is nailed down to the fill and bottom strips. It is then done in the weaving station]

she is making a medium market basket; has a pile of other types of baskets next to her to weave too;

[pause tape]

BF: how company got started, "slightly before my time."

PS: [from across shop] "but not by much."

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BF: "Well I've heard tales that Pam was trained by one of the Day Brothers, now, I don't know if that's for sure right, but she don't dispute it."

Started by Samuel and Edward Day from MA; sometime after the Civil War around 1876 maybe; came to MD because closer to market they were serving; plantations and farms of the south; [find it a little strange that they came here to serve plantations after the civil war, wasn't agricultural economy in serious change at this time?]

White oak readily available; originally located on water shipped by sailing vessels to points south; remained in family until Depression; last Day in the area died 3-4 years ago; in continuous operation since 1876; construction still the same and production still the same as when Day's owned it; not a changeable business; use electric motors now but that's about it;

Basket business over taken by corrugated box, plastic pail etc; used to be primary packaging means; now a novelty item; or decoration; though people use our baskets but not in industrial production

Story of farmer in Va who uses their baskets all the time; orders directly from them now;

Working in the changing market; creating new shapes; square baskets are modern day thing; 10 or more designs that have developed for home market; lidded baskets are quite new in design really; edition baskets made for collectors; customers also ask for certain things and then if enough ask they will create it; working toward what customer wants; also look at what competitors making;

DYEING: uses walnut stain; eventually all baskets become honey colored if not stained because of tanin and oils in wood;

END SIDE A
BEGINS SIDE B

[we have moved out into the show room, customers talking in background]
stains and colors of baskets; changing boards during fill process will also produce dill.
Colored woods;

easter and Christmas edition baskets; get a brass plate and numbered; some people will always buy that number each year; #1 basket stays in store;

[interrupted by customer with question; tape off]

good stuff 10 u `kA roc'
a second listen

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