



### **History of the Shelton Basket Company**

The Shelton Basket Company began its operation in Shelton in 1911 when Mr. Abraham Lavietes brought his basket manufacturing operation from Columbia, Connecticut to its new location in Shelton. The predecessor to the Shelton Basket Company was a company founded in 1862 in Columbia by a Mr. Norman P. Little for the manufacture of genuine ash and oak splint baskets. He continued the business for over forty years, but Mr. Little was getting older and decided to sell his farm and basket business to a young and enterprising Mr. Lavietes who made many innovative changes to increase productivity without sacrificing any of the quality of the hand-drawn oak and ash splint baskets.

In the early 1900's, unfortunately, the only major means of transportation was by railroad and it was a 14 mile wagon trip to Willimantic to ship the baskets by rail. Sometimes, in bad weather, it was impossible to make the trip. Mr. Lavietes decided that the basket operation had to be located closer to the railroad facilities and in his search he found a brand new factory building available in Shelton. It had just been built by B.N. Beard, a highly respected builder in Shelton. In fact, the factory was reputed to be the first poured concrete factory in the country. Mr. Beard had discovered a way to interrupt the pouring of concrete and slow the setting process so he could pour the following day without developing a seam or crack. Another first for Shelton! So in 1911, the company was moved from Columbia and to the new name of The Shelton Basket Company.

At the time, most of their products were destined for heavy-duty material handling purposes. Special types were designed for the potato picking industry on Long Island, the oyster growing trade along both shores of Long Island Sound, the mushroom growers around Kennett Square, and the asparagus growers centering around Rochelle, Illinois.

In addition, they manufactured special material handling baskets for the laundry industry, the bakery industry, the railroad dining cars, groceries and meat markets, and the chain stores. They also made all the vending baskets for the major league baseball parks as well as the racetracks from Maine to New Orleans through the Harry M. Stevens Company who, early in the 1900's, had the food concessions for all these sports facilities.

As the years progressed, the company expanded its product line to include household clothes baskets, mail baskets, market baskets, clothes hampers, etc. They followed with a line of picnic baskets, pie baskets, refrigerator baskets, flower and garden baskets, and fireplace log baskets. These were finished with a walnut oil stain and then sprayed with a coating of clear lacquer to enhance and preserve the handsome finish. This expanded line sold to the retail trade through some of the finest department stores and catalog houses in the country. Shelton Baskets were considered "The Tiffany of the Industry" because of their exceptional durability and the expert and painstaking craftsmanship.

Following World War II they also designed a line of very attractive miniature baskets for the ladies handbag industry. These smaller baskets, with their handsome finish, were also designed for packaging purposes for some of the finest food and cosmetic companies in the country.

Mr. Lavietes had been joined by his son, Ray, in 1936 and the automation and streamlining of the many hand operations was stepped up in an effort to continue to produce these genuine splint baskets at a competitive price. Because there were still so many hand operations required, it became continually more difficult to compete for labor with the many new highly-automated industries that were coming to the area. Also, suitable ash and oak lumber was becoming scarce in the Connecticut area and, therefore, more costly.

Meanwhile, material handling needs were gradually changing. Potatoes were now being picked by machine and automated handling of other crops developed. Laundries began using canvas baskets. Plastics and wire products began to replace many of the other Shelton Baskets because they required less labor to manufacture and, therefore, were lower in price.

Eventually, in 1960, it was found necessary to sell this fine quality, hand-drawn splint basket business and move it to a Chippewa Indian reservation in Hayward, Wisconsin, where labor and lumber were more readily available. So ended the splint basket manufacturing operation in Shelton, not unlike many other industries that had prospered in Shelton in the late 1800's and early 1900's only to succumb to changing times in both product requirements and manufacturing processes.