GENERATIONS of Irish families crafted baskets from materials such as straw, rush, willow, and hickory. For thousands of years, weavers created durable, lightweight baskets for specialized purposes, such as carrying eggs, catching eels, costuming mummers, and burying the dead.

Award-winning basket maker Bob Johnston works at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum near Belfast. Although he is not from a basket-making family, Johnston has spent years studying with traditional basket makers in order to document and recreate traditional Irish baskets.

Willow (or “salley,” probably from the Irish saileách) was widely used for basket making.

*Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;*

*She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.*

—Traditional. Collected by William Butler Yeats (1889)