

**Gail COLLINS, director, “Making the Most of Things”, editor,
John KRAMER, musical accompaniment, Pam MORGAN, Emile
BENOIT (Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Coop Ltd., St.
John’s, Newfoundland, Dual Track Mono (26:20), VHS
Formats-Colour [\$295 Canadian for institutional availability
from G. Collins (709) 754-1490])**

Cynthia Boyd

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Gail COLLINS, director, "Making the Most of Things", editor, John KRAMER, musical accompaniment, Pam MORGAN, Emile BENOIT (Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-op Ltd., St. John's, Newfoundland, Dual Track Mono (26:20), VHS Formats-Colour [\$295 Canadian for institutional availability from G. Collins (709) 754-1490]).

This impressive and fascinating film depicts the life of Elizabeth Gale, a furniture maker from Hampden (Great Northern Peninsula), Newfoundland, who, at the age of eighty-one, creates functional and decorative furnishings. The film, directed by Gale's granddaughter, Gail Collins, provides detailed insight into the life and work of a craftsperson. It is one of the few portrayals of a Newfoundland woman performing an occupation usually reserved for men.

Narrated by Agnes Walsh and accompanied with the peaceful and somber violin of Emile Benoit, the film opens as Elizabeth Gale begins her day. As the morning light falls on the community of Hampden, Gale is chopping and shaping wood for a sewing cabinet. Old photographs of Gale, her mother and father, and siblings interpose at this point, introducing the viewer to the difficult life in which she lived as a child in Newfoundland. Within this introduction, the viewer is enlightened by the all too brief recollections of satisfied customers who show and describe furnishings and objects that Gale has made for them. "Betty", as her neighbours, friends, and customers call her, first constructed furniture out of necessity. Her general line consisted of washstands, dressers, sewing cabinets, sofas, and picture frames, yet she became known for her abilities to fulfill individual requests as well.

Throughout the film Gale's daughters, Maud and Margaret, describe their mother as a woman who did just about anything from making soap, clothing, sealskin boots, to hooked mats. Apparently, Elizabeth Gale never said something could not be done. Originally from the now abandoned community of Bear Cove, Gale learned how to make furniture with very few tools and scant materials. When ordering sandpaper, she may have had to wait months for a coastal boat to deliver it. She usually improvised by using glass and dogfish tails to smooth the wood for furniture pieces. Instead of applying expensive varnishes, Gale stained her furniture with coffee. Much like earlier Newfoundland outport furniture makers, Gale's furniture designs are based on a number of different available sources such as mail-order catalogues. Gale's trademark can be seen in her implementation of decorations like carved butterflies, scrolls, leaves, and flowers that adorn the surfaces of cabinets and bedroom furnishings.

Elizabeth Gale now designs and creates functional pieces not out of necessity but out of a desire "to pass on something of herself". As her story comes

to a conclusion so does the completion of the sewing cabinet for her granddaughter. A testimony to her strength of character as an individual and a craftsperson, Gale simply and succinctly describes why she continues to create and design furniture: "It grewed in me see, and I can't get it out."

Not only is Elizabeth Gale's life and work a joy to hear and watch, but the film's use of shadows, colour, and sound presents a truly realistic and moving portrayal of a humble woman. This film is strongly recommended to students of Canadian Maritime and/or Atlantic history, folklore, and material culture.

Cynthia BOYD
Department of Folklore
ST-John's, Newfoundland
