

THE OLD SAW

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE GUILD OF NEW HAMPSHIRE WOODWORKERS
132 Drinkwater Road, Kensington, NH 03833

December 18, 1991

Volume 2, Number 3

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - - - John Skewes

Every so often I feel as if my work is boring and stagnant. This usually occurs when I'm building end tables. Even if they are to go with a bed I've just completed, something about building them makes me feel trapped. Perhaps I need a helper to do end tables while I build the more challenging pieces. But people need end tables for their homes; the money is green; and I choose this life. So it goes.

Well, this is what was going through my mind while driving home from Jere Osgood's shop after the last meeting. I felt overwhelmed by his ability and imagination. His work is fluid and light and defies the structural limitations of the material. I kept thinking that he must spend weeks at the drafting table and possess an extraordinary ability to think in three dimensions. If I hadn't known Jere from other meetings, and he weren't such a nice guy, I could have written him off. I could have said he makes furniture for evil New Yorkers, or that his work is ego driven. Instead I came away thinking that Jere's spectacular furniture is very personal and organic. And I think of Jere in much the same way.

So it took me a couple of days to process what I saw at Jere's, and to understand the nature of my own work. When I look outside my window I see a New England landscape. When I look inside I see a New England farm house. I'm a son of New England. And I build the furniture of New England. It fits like an old sweater and is close to my heart. I thank Jere Osgood for opening his shop and allowing us to examine his work and allowing me to more closely examine my own work.

John

INTERVIEW with Bill Thomas, host of next Guild Meeting

Bill Thomas does cabinetmaking and builds period furniture mainly on a commission basis. His shop is located in Hillsboro Lower Village. He attended North Bennett St. School in Boston during 1978-79 and taught furniture making at New England Technical Institute for three years. His affection for old machinery has taken him by necessity into the field of tool making and metal working.

Old Saw: Could you give us a little history of your shop?

Bill: The woodworking shop was built around 1936 by a blacksmith who decided he wasn't getting enough business blacksmithing, so he set up the shop to build rowboats. A Model A powered the machinery by means of gears, belts and drive shafts, etc. I have since made some changes and upgraded the power source to a "one lunger" engine. The shop was bought in the fifties by a contractor who kept the boat business going into the seventies, when I bought it.

O.S.: How did you become involved with period furniture?

Bill: I guess I had a traditional background growing up in New England and being surrounded by the stuff; it was what I was familiar with. I did carpentry for about five years; mostly on old houses. I was beginning to think about colonial pine furniture when I saw a brochure for the North Bennett St. School. I became interested and eventually attended.

O.S.: Then North Bennett St. was where you got into the fancier styles?

Bill: People always think of North Bennett St. School in terms of 18th century furniture. The thing to remember is that it's not a design school such as R.I.S.D. It's a trade school and the furniture making program is geared to teach you how to make furniture of every kind. The fact that they work with 18th century stuff is because it's fairly well designed, uses good joinery techniques, and is a good example of sophisticated furniture construction.

O.S.: Are there any contemporary furniture makers who's work you admire or are inspired by?

Bill: I admire anybody who is doing good work whatever the style as long as it's well made, well proportioned and works as a piece. I suppose I get a little hot under the collar with work that is too "cutesy", or where people go out of their way in terms of bells and whistles. It's unfortunate when a maker ignores the purpose of a piece.

O.S.: Do you ever design your own furniture?

Bill: It hasn't been a big push for me. I've done some "spec" work but find it hard to market it by driving around to shops and galleries. If you're doing contemporary work, like Wendell Castle, then you put it on the art market and try to sell it as art. I built an Italian renaissance dining set where I got to interpret the design and draw it from scratch, but it still followed classical lines.

O.S.: Do you ever get involved in restoration work?

Bill: I do a little but I don't like to publicize it too much. Typically what happens is that someone will bring a piece of furniture that's been in their grandmother's attic and was factory-made to begin with. It's just not worth the time and effort to restore it.

O.S.: How do you market your work?

Bill: Recently I have had some stuff at Kaleidoscope in Hanover. I have an ad in Antiques magazine. I've built quite a few Queen Anne wing chair frames for Ted Partridge Replication, and have also had some other work there. Then there are occasional shows and the old standby, "word of mouth".

O.S.: What is your favorite finish for a table top?

Bill: The finish that I use almost universally is an oil varnish mix that I make myself. I'll put a thinned-out sealer coat of spar varnish first and then wipe on multiple coats of the varnish, linseed oil, and turpentine mix.

O.S.: What are your current interests?

Bill: I'm interested in Irish music and am building Uilleann pipes (the bagpipes of Ireland) using blackwood and brass. It gets pretty technical and involves some metal working. It's a nice diversion.

REVIEW/OPINION by Lou Yelgin

At the risk of having to bid against some of you in the future, I'm going to spill the beans and let you know about one of my favorite sources of used and antique woodworking tools.

My first encounter with "Your Country Auctioneer" was two years ago. A friend of mine knew about the place, but didn't have specific directions. Since you can always use just one more tool, I took a risk and headed north from Merrimack one Saturday morning. Having missed the infamous turnoff at the Franklin Pierce homestead on Routes 31, I arrived late that day. The auction had already started. As I rushed up the hill, past the mooing cows and their clanging bells, I had a feeling I was about to stumble into something unique and exciting.

A crowd of about 50 people were collected around an old barn. The mood was serious as each person strained, evaluated and judged the auction proceedings. They were an odd collection of old geezers in mismatched clothes, grizzled thirtysomething guys in International Harvester hats, yuppies in chinos, and seated spouses knitting or spinning wool. All attention was focused on Richard Crane, the colorful owner of the auction house. Dressed in red suspenders, farm pants, and a black derby, he was working the crowd much like a comic at an Improv workshop. "Mister, are you bidding on that Stanley 45 or just swatting flies?" Soon, down would come his trusty Charlie Chaplin cane with a thwack, "Sold to number 18 for \$60!"

Over the years, I've come to know some of the regulars and have observed a rather unsettling phenomenon amongst both tool collectors and users. The yearning for more and more tools has often times created an auction atmosphere steeped in fierce competition and lacking in basic politeness. The tool preview can resemble the cattle stampede at Filene's Basement with much blocking, elbow splaying and toe stomping. We are, after all, just bidding on hunks of metal and wood. Nonetheless, this does not seem to be the view of many of the regulars who I'm sure will be visiting "old Charlie's" widow before Charlie is even cold in the ground, trying to swing a good deal on that boxwood plow plane Charlie always wanted him to have.

Still, Richard Crane's humor and endless tool inventory make a trip to the Hillsboro auction house a pleasant and worthwhile experience. I'm always excited by the possibility of finding that special tool created years ago by an ingenious craftsman. Where else can one find 100 year old laminated timber framing chisels that only need to be resharpened and fitted with a new handle to be brought back to life? If you're into broad axes, adzes, planes, drawknives, froes, and an occasional Delta 6" jointer, Crane's is the place to be.

To get the 1992 auction calendar, call or write: Your Country Auctioneer, Inc., 63 Poor Farm Road, Hillsboro, NH 03244, 603-478-5723.

GUILD MEETINGS

Our next meeting will be held on January 18, 1992 at Bill Thomas's Hillsboro shop. The topic is "Old Machinery and Pouring Babbitt Bearings".

Steering Committee Meeting 9:30, Business Meeting 10:30, Lunch (bring your own) 11:30, Demonstration 12:30.

Here are the directions (you will not be receiving a separate card.)

Take Rt. 9 to the Jct. of Rt. 31 North. From the North, turn Left; from the South, turn Right onto "Second NH Turnpike". This is at the "Corner Store" and a blinking yellow light. Go 1/8 mile to fork. Bear Left. Second house immediately after fork. (house on left). There is a sign. Use door under porch, next to sign. Phone: 478-3488.

We have also scheduled Bruce Hoadley for a talk and discussion about wood on Saturday, March 28, 1992. Hoadley is Professor of Wood Technology at the University of Massachusetts and is the author of two books: "Understanding Wood" and "Identifying Wood". He knows wood inside and out, and his presentation should not be missed. Mark your calendars now. The location has not yet been confirmed.

CAN YOU HOST A GUILD MEETING?

We have had meetings in many locations throughout New Hampshire (Dublin, Franklin, Newport, and Wilton). To continue our present policy of having our meetings at different shops, we need volunteer hosts. The main requirements are (1) space for about 50 people, and (2) an idea for a demonstration. (Even these are negotiable.) Please see Steve Cunliffe at one of the meetings or send a card to Steve at 10 Patch Road, Henniker, NH 03242.

LOST TAPES

If you have borrowed video tapes (of previous demonstrations) and are finished with them, PLEASE return the tapes to John Skewes or bring them to the January meeting! Thanks.

WOOD DAY at SHAKER VILLAGE

Last year's Wood Day was a great success, and next year's is planned for Saturday, May 9. It's a great day to get together and to share skills. If you can participate please write to me (David Emerson) at Shaker Village, 288 Shaker Road, Canterbury, NH 03224, or call me at home (7 to 9 PM) 783-4403. If you can demonstrate I need to know specifics as soon as possible to coordinate demonstrations. If you can combine with others on your demonstration it will give you more time to enjoy the day. I'm looking also for general volunteers to help others with demonstrations, set up, guide, handle Guild booth, etc.

 QUOTES OF NOTE

The U.S. Forest Service states:

"One forest region after another has been attacked. With the exception of Maine, the New England states are cutting mostly second or third-growth timber. The box factories there take white pine saplings down to 6" diameter. The so-called 'inexhaustible' white pine forests of Michigan are gone. The cream of our hardwoods is gone, and it is becoming more and more difficult to get the high grades that our great manufacturing industries require. The prices of forest products have risen more rapidly than those of other commodities. This indicates that the supply of timber is not keeping pace with the demand."

As reported in "The Wood-Worker" magazine, March 1909!

 C L A S S I F I E D A D V E R T I S E M E N T S

 FOR SALE

Bosch Random Orbit Sander - 5". Used Very Little. \$65. Leigh 24" Dovetail Jig. Used Very Little. \$225. Dayton 100,000 BTU Kerosene Space Heater. Used One Season, Like New. \$200. John. 778-7360.

13" Planer. HD. Many Extras. \$1200 or BO. 16" American Table Saw with Sliding Table, Double Arbor. \$1000 or BO. Jeff. 226-2731.

Walker Turner 14" Band Saw. All Cast Iron Frame, Wheels, Doors and Base. Some New Parts. Needs a Tinkerer's Love and Care. \$250.

Sand-Rite Pneumatic Sander 6" x 7" and 3" x 7" Diameter Drums, with Many Extra Sanding Sleeves. On Shop-made Oak Stand with Motor. \$275.

Makita Waterstone Blade/Knife Sharpener with 1000 Grit and 120 Grit Green Wheel. \$165.

Adler Stroke Sander. 3 Motors, 3 Phase. 36 x 96 Table. Assorted Sanding Belts. Price Reduced. \$2500 or Best Reasonable Offer. John 456-2135.

 WANTED TO BUY

Used Bench-Top Drill Press. Lou. 424-4888.

 SHOP SPACE AVAILABLE

The Woodworks, a 14 year old cooperative, with a fully equipped 3200 sq. ft. shop seeks a new member(s) full or part time. Please call or write to: The Woodworks, 855 Islington St., Portsmouth NH 03801. 603-436-3805.
