



P.O. Box 68343  
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

## MAY 2013 NEWSLETTER

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### *The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Spring Meeting*

will be on Saturday, June 8th, 2013 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. at *Fort Houston* in Nashville, Tennessee, and will feature an informal presentation on "Promoting Your Business with Social Media", as well as a *Shop Crawl* to the shops of some of our other members who are located in that neighborhood.



*Fort Houston is the product of two local entities, Brick Factory Nashville and Zombie Shop, joining forces to open a huge facility that provides creative, innovative, and technological resources for the members of the community. Within their 10,000+ sq. ft. space, they house a full wood shop, mechanical shop and print shop, as well as options for dedicated and shared work desks. The Cumberland Furniture Guild is currently working out a back-and-forth relationship with Fort Houston in which we will be providing connections for instructors and they will provide us with shop space for our Guild's Workshops Program. We wanted all of you to see this great new creative space for yourselves.*

#### ***Directions to Fort Houston:***

From just South of downtown on **I-65 Take Exit 81 to Wedgewood Ave.** If you are coming from the South turn Right onto Wedgewood, if from the North turn Left on Wedgewood. In 2/10ths of a mile **turn Left on Martin Street.** In 6/10ths of a mile (three blocks) turn **Right on Houston Street.** Fort Houston is 350 ft. on the Left at **500 Houston Street, Nashville, TN 37203** If you need help or directions the day of the meeting please call Dale McLoud at (615) 513-1924.

*Fort Houston has a shop area outfitted with a wide assortment of new Jet tools*



# Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

## Steam Power and Other Anachronisms

Recently DiAnne Patrick sent out an email with a very appealing little video of an old partially-steam-powered box mill. Perhaps you got it too. Really great stuff. Well it sure got me reminiscing about all of the fine, and weird, and dangerous old machinery I've encountered. I spent many wonderful years prowling used machinery businesses and bone-yards all over the country, and met some real characters who were as interesting and as quirky as the machinery they collected, refurbished, and sold.

The first I should mention is a steam-powered sawmill that continued to operate in Campaign, Tn. (between McMinnville and Sparta) at least until the late nineteen-eighties. I just had to stop every time I passed by it. It was still commercially very viable, and closed only because its owner-operator got too old to keep going, and no-one else understood the equipment as well as he did. Nothing demonstrated the folly of "improving" to all-electric or diesel

foisted on us by TVA and the Rural Electrification Act of the 1950's, as poignantly as did this mill.

Of course by then a lot of the equipment was held together by baling wire (the duct-tape of pre-duct-tape days), brazed repairs, and furnace cement, because no one was making replacement and upgrade parts for such "passé" technology. Yet still, with a not-very-large one cylinder steam engine, and a really fine twelve-foot diameter flywheel with those sweet s-shaped spokes and the remnants of its elegant 19th C pinstriping, the mill was capable of sawing, gang-ripping, re-sawing, and planing thousands of board feet of lumber each day. Incidentally, if you look carefully at the video DiAnne sent, you'll see that a single steam cylinder about 5" in diameter with a stroke of maybe 10 - 12" was capable of running all the very big equipment in that shop. Steam's power is truly awesome, and is also at its greatest at very low rpm's.

Everything ran off a system of great-shafts, pulleys, and huge flapping leather-belts and that would probably

cause a fainting spell for any safety inspector today. That system could surely be improved upon today, but nothing could surpass the fact that the mill's boiler was fired only by all the sawdust and off-cuts produced by the mill itself. Several chain-type conveyors, also run by the steam engine, automatically shoveled the fuel from its fall-off point into the fire-box, in a perfect closed-loop system. It didn't even need someone to stoke the fire. The owner once said to me that his normal daily running costs were about one dollar's worth of oil and grease. He re-condensed the steam and returned it to the boiler, and probably had to add some extra water each day. I've since



Photos courtesy the Phillips Trust



learned that there are also some chemicals that are essential to add to the water to keep the metal from rusting and scaling. All that being said, compare that to the several hundred \$ a day, at least, in electricity it would take to run a similar operation on all electric motors. And that rationale doesn't even consider the exquisite, spell-binding symphony and spectacle of an operating steam engine.

How did we ever get sold the "modern" bill-of-goods in the first place?

At the other end of the sound-principle-spectrum is one of the most devilish machines I have ever encountered. And from the numbers I've seen, there must have been quite a few made. I'm sure none are presently offered for sale, as contemporary safety regulations must have mandated that all these machines be crushed or melted-down. What this consisted of was a normal (aside from the wicked square cutterhead) 6" or 8" jointer with one significant addition: Extending straight out about a foot from the cutterhead shaft, on its same axis into the working area of the operator, was a carving spindle which accepted any number and shape of the old fashioned multi-spur cutters. This whirling horror could not be disengaged, was not guarded, and was placed at exactly

the perfect spot to encounter the family jewels of whoever was unfortunate enough to be assigned to operate it. It's hard to even imagine why this particular arrangement was deemed necessary; but apparently Victorian factory carving methods saw this as some kind of two-into-one wonder machine. By the way, if you are interested in old machinery, an old jointer can be a great piece of kit, but do not under any circumstances retain the original square cutterhead. They did not just take the careless fingertip, but were satisfied by nothing less than the entire hand up to the wrist. On the other hand, babbitt bearings, properly repoured (if you can find someone to do it) are really quite smooth up to 4-5000 rpm, maybe even better than the average ball bearing.

One of the most amazing pieces of early 20th C engineering, to my mind, were the huge helical planers that predated the modern segmented versions by 80 or 90 years. The heads would have three or four, sometimes as many as six, helical grooves machined into them – not so hard. But then someone managed to manufacture, accurately enough to register into these helical grooves and be tightened down without breaking, individual long helical knives, often 30" long and wrapping twice around a diameter of about 6", out of high carbon steel. They looked a lot like some of David Knudtson's wonderful curli-cues. These would then be sharpened in-place throughout their useful life by a very clever over-head grinder that turned the head and followed the groove. Most elegant.

Oh, the four-head matching planers that were the size and weight of a medium locomotive, and contained enough cast iron to make ten thousand modern table saws; or the double-spindle shapers that could take a 10" stack of knives and were so big the operator had to stand on a platform; or the fearsome copy lathes that swung a 14" diameter by 36" long cutterhead that looked like something from a modern blood-and-gore film

## Appalachian Center Exhibition

Don't forget that we have an active Call for Entries for our next Juried Exhibition to be held at the Appalachian Center for Craft in Smithville, Tennessee. The deadline for submissions is June 24th. It also happens to dovetail perfectly with the Call for Entries for the Master Woodworkers Show in Knoxville, (see below) which is put on by our sister organization, the East Tennessee Woodworkers Guild. Since the two shows do not conflict, it would be very logical for our members to enter the same pieces in both exhibitions. visit [www.cumberlandfurnitureguild.org](http://www.cumberlandfurnitureguild.org) for an entry form.



## 17th Master Woodworker's Show

The Master Woodworkers Show is an unconventional blend of gallery layout with the open atmosphere of a festival-style show. The Show is hosted by the East Tennessee Woodworkers Guild and the Arts & Culture Alliance of Knoxville. The 17th Master Woodworkers Show takes place Friday-Sunday, November 1-3, 2013 in downtown Knoxville. The entry postmark deadline is Thursday, August 1st, and the show dates are November 1st - 3rd.



and spun at 4000 rpm.

I owned one of those once. One day it threw one of its dozens of pendulous cutters, seriously upsetting the crucial balance of such an unlikely contrivance. The four-ton machine began to gyrate, and bounce, and dance across the shop floor like a whirling dervish with inner ear problems. Everyone in the room cleared the space like a bomb had gone off, and the machine's progress only stopped when it reached the end of its power cord, snapping it. The operator had to be sent home for the day, not for physical injuries, but for temporary PTSD.

Some of these machines were great; some should never have been birthed; and now some of the modern technology is also mind-bogglingly good as well. Like Joni Mitchell's song says, "Something's lost and something's gained in living every day." -Alf ♦

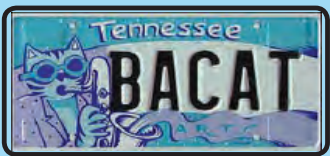
(Editor's note: here is a link to the video Alf refers to at the beginning of this piece: [http://youtube.googleapis.com/v/\\_mKSKZau9qs](http://youtube.googleapis.com/v/_mKSKZau9qs))

## Swap & Shop

**For sale:** mobile base for an Industrial Sawstop table saw, used moderately for about 2 years, perfect working order. Asking \$200 OBO. Call Chris at (615) 442-7770.

## Support the Arts!

Support the Tennessee Arts with this special license plate. The plate is only \$25 more than a regular plate and the proceeds go to all the programs and services of the Tennessee Arts Commission.



The Cumberland Furniture Guild has received generous support from the TAC, so let's support what they do! Go to <http://www.tennessee.gov/revenue/vehicle/licenseplates/misc/mostpop.htm> for more information on how to get yours.

[www.tennessee.gov/revenue/vehicle/licenseplates/misc/mostpop.htm](http://www.tennessee.gov/revenue/vehicle/licenseplates/misc/mostpop.htm) for more information on how to get yours.

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## *Workshops are Here!*

As most of you are aware, we had our first Guild Workshop on April 20th and 21st on “Tips on Building Authentic Reproductions” with Alf Sharp. We had a great turnout and everyone had a fantastic time. There were an abundance of techniques and skills taught that can be used not only in building reproductions but also in our everyday woodworking. There was so much material covered in this workshop, it would be impossible for me to tell you about all of it. So let me just highlight a bit for you. To start with, we learned the difference between a reproduction, a replica, and a fake. Alf discussed understanding the aesthetic ideals of the era or style you are reproducing, along with the tools and lumber available during that period. There was also a discussion about patterns and templates and the importance of precise measurements. Finishing techniques and distressing were also covered. In closing, this class was a plus for anyone interested in building reproductions. Thanks to all who attended! If you missed this workshop then you missed a great learning experience. However, we are planning other workshops in the near future. We have a carving workshop with Furniture Maker Scott Thompson coming up soon. You can sign up for that one now. Other workshops planned for the future include techniques such as bending, finishing, and inlays. Keep an eye on your emails; we will be announcing these as they become available. If you have any ideas for workshops that you would like to present or participate in, drop me a note at [workshops@cumberlandfurnitureguild.net](mailto:workshops@cumberlandfurnitureguild.net). I would love to hear about them. Bob Peters, Workshops Director ♦



Photo by Worth Squire

Participants in our inaugural workshop “Tips on Building Authentic Reproductions”, left to right: Len Reinhardt, Frank Ramsey, Bill Maddox, Rob Lanier, Alf Sharp, Dale Shade, Mike Willis, Doug Snyder, Ronald Young, Bob Peters, Andy Ferris and Ric Taylor.

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