



P.O. Box 68343
Nashville, Tennessee 37206

OCTOBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



The Cumberland Furniture Guild would like to extend a word of thanks to the Tennessee Arts Commission for funding related to our current exhibition.

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The Cumberland Furniture Guild's Fall Meeting
will be on **SUNDAY, October 28th, 2012** from **2 p.m. until 5 p.m.** at the
Customs House Museum in Clarksville, Tennessee.

This meeting will feature a panel discussion with noted furniture makers
Graham Campbell, Alf Sharp, and Jim Horne. The theme of the panel will be

“My Biggest Influences from the 20th Century and Beyond”

This will also be our last chance to take in this great exhibition.

***Members with pieces in the exhibition will then be able to load
out their furniture at the close of the meeting should they choose.***

Directions to The Customs House Museum:

From I-24 & I-65 North of Nashville **Take I-24 W toward Clarksville 34 miles to Exit 11** for TN-76 toward Clarksville and **turn Left onto TN-76 W**; in 3.3 miles **turn Right onto Madison St. (signs for TN 76 TN 112)**; in 4.7 miles **turn Right onto University Ave.**; in 500 feet **take the first Left onto Commerce St. and the Customs House will be on the Left** at 200 S. 2nd St, Clarksville, TN 37040. If you need help or directions the day of the meeting please call Dale McLoud at (615) 513-1924.



*Customs House
Gallery Shots- If
you haven't seen
the exhibition
yet, it's almost
too late!*



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Letter From The President

By Alf Sharp

Then and the Art of Machine Maintenance

In times past, woodworkers were as likely to be called a “mechanic” as someone who worked with metal contrivances. The ancient Greek word “mekhanikos” meant “full of resources, ingenious, inventive”, and from the middle ages to the 19th century any one who worked with his or her hands was a mechanic. It was only with the rise of steam engines, industrial factories, and the internal combustion engine that specialists in working on that kind of equipment co-opted the title. I really like the “full of resources, ingenious, inventive” description. Isn’t that what we all yearn to be?

It used to be that woodworkers made most of their own tools (often with the help of their local blacksmith). And even today, most of us enjoy the challenge of designing and fabricating a jig or fixture that helps one of our machine tools do a task, either more precisely, or repeatedly. The current purveyors of “more stuff” to the woodworking crowd seem bent on eliminating this activity though, offering ever more ready-made jigs to accomplish any task one can think of (and a few I didn’t even know I should be doing). While it may be ingenious on their part, most of these gadgets take some of the fun out of shop-time for me.

I used to be a sucker for any clever new way to accomplish a task, only to find months later that the gizmo would be languishing away on some upper shelf, perhaps never once having been used. Sometimes this was because it actually took longer to set up the new tool than it formerly took just to do the job with a simple hand tool and some skill; other times it was because I had already developed an effective and comfortable way to accomplish the task, and really needed no revised methods to get the job done. This awareness has saved me quite a bit of money lately, and means that I still have a little room to walk around in my shop.

Still, a typical one-man shop today contains many more tools than would have been the case two hundred years ago, and those machines can be quite complicated pieces of precision metal construction. The remarkable thing is that nearly every woodworker I know is quite capable of at least making fundamental adjustments to his/her machines; most are quite willing to completely disassemble a machine to replace a major part. No doubt this is largely because the expense of having a machine repaired every time something broke down would amount to roughly the entire yearly net income of said shop. But I think there is much more than just that. Remember the “full of resources, ingenious, inventive” description? This really is at the core of the personality of every soul that passionately takes up any craft. Craftsmanship is primarily an attitude, not a set of skills, and that attitude wants to understand how things work, how they can be made better, how they can be used more effectively. Also, such a mind-set is likely unwilling to wait for a repair person (who may, in fact, be of questionable skill himself) when a project is percolating along and the creative juices are flowing.

Oh so many years ago I bought my first planer, a sweet little Parks 12" number – they aren’t being made anymore, sadly. The old guy who was acting as the local Parks dealer out of his garage in Knoxville had clearly been a machine mechanic in his earlier

days, and, it seems, considered anyone not from that tradition as having tassels for hands and Farina for brains. Several times he pointed to four large bolts on the top of the machine and said, almost hysterically, “Whatever you do, don’t touch these four bolts.” (I’m pretty sure he wasn’t employing Bre’r Rabbit’s “Please don’t fro me into dat briar patch” psychology.) Well, I set the machine up, and began planing, only to get a horrible dap at the end of the cut. I read and re-read the instructions, made sure the machine was perfectly level and rock solid in its place, tried different depth of cuts, everything. Pouring over the exploded drawing in the manual, it became clear to me that the solution lay in adjusting the four forbidden bolts. Quivering like my friend’s chicken-killing dog, I approached the sacred bolts, and tweaked them. Lordy-be, the machine didn’t explode and the the dap got better! In another ten minutes, I had every thing working like it ought to.

The resulting epiphany has since characterized my approach to any tool I have introduced into my shop. When I had the factory, we even made several pieces of custom-purpose machinery, including a monster stroke sander and a gang-kerfer for bending table aprons. Once we completely dismantled a drum sander the size of a Sherman tank that had three 52” drums about 12” in diameter, each with a 25 horsepower motor. We never could get the third drum to hold on to its sandpaper though. Wide-belt sanders have made machines like that

obsolete, thankfully. I know many one man shops that now have a large wide-belt sander to ease the drudgery of hand-sanding flat surfaces. Sanding is one task that I think all but the most moss-backed Luddites would be happy to turn over to whatever kind of work saving machinery might come along.

A completely different kind of “work-saver” lurks in the shadows, though, or has perhaps even finally stepped out to front stage. CNC tool manipulation really does threaten to make the skilled hand worker almost unnecessary, except as a quaint anachronism. Maybe some of us will be kept around as museum curiosities. I used to say that there were just some things that could only be done by hand (and in fact there are still a precious few), but now there exist items that could only be created by a machine, specifically the CNC 3-D printer, which can build a monolithic structure from the inside out. High quality, versatile machines are becoming available at

very reasonable small-shop prices.

I know there are many, sometimes even yours truly, who equate the change CNC is bringing to manufacturing with the introduction a couple of hundred years ago of the table saw or the machine planer. No doubt when those tools first came onto the scene, skilled benchmen wagged their heads and worried what the world was coming to. But I suspect the CNC revolution is different. For example, even I can’t really imagine why I would any more spend three or four days cutting out a complex marquetry pattern when a simple CNC machine can do a perfect job in about an hour and a half. The sad thing is that doing it by hand is a highly developed knack that takes a long time to perfect, but is likely to go to the graveyard of lost skills where braiding buggy whips and repairing typewriters lie.

Will the primary skill of future woodworkers be the ability to write computer code? It seems to be so. Fortunately I’m closer to the end of my career than many of you, because I don’t think I’ll ever grasp programming. Don’t forget to tell your grandchildren about the days when a woodworker actually pushed a piece of sharp steel through the wood with his bare hands. Or, better yet, teach them to do it, too. Excelsior -Alf ♦



Image from www.vintagemachinery.org

Swap & Shop

For Sale: High capacity infrared shop heater. Runs on 1 or 3 phase. Recommended min. 12' ceiling height— \$350.00
Oliver 260D table saw. Sliding table, dual 16" arbors. Completely redone a few years ago. 5hp, 3 phase. \$2000.00
email justplanewood@comcast.net or call (615) 500-6246.

For Sale: Jet 5 HP Right tilt table saw with 50" extended bed, mobile base, micro adjust fence and Powermatic Router lift. \$1700
Powermatic 20" Planer on mobile base. \$1900
Powermatic 8" Jointer, Model 60B, with mobile base. \$900
Laguna LT 18, 18" bandsaw with a dozen blades. \$900
call James Fenton (615) 418-1535

For Sale: Various hand planes, some wood moulding planes and some steel— call Ron La Flair at (615) 806-0749 ♦

Tennessee's Old Growth Forests

By Mike Bell

Curator of Furniture & Popular Culture at
the Tennessee State Museum

When I first started hiking in the Smoky Mountains in the 1980s I'd ask the forest rangers where I might see a bit of virgin forest. They all recommended the Albright Grove, a square mile of virgin woodland on a ridge the loggers never got to. It was one of my first and most enjoyable hikes in those mountains. I've always been inspired by deep woods and tall trees, as a woodworker seeking beautiful wood grain, and also as a historian because these places help me imagine pioneer life in colonial America. The eight mile hike was worth it, ending with tulip poplar trees nine foot across. They looked primeval with the misty clouds hovering above them. I suppose the scale of the old growth forest brought me back to my first magical encounter with the forests of Allegany State Park as a seven-year-old, when I made stick houses in a hemlock grove on a ridge far above my family's campsite.

Try to imagine what the pioneers viewed in the 1700s when they first came to the wilderness in what the Cherokee called "Tanasi," aka "Tennessee." In the late 1500s English geographer Richard Hakluyt promoted colonization in the New World writing that North America was "infinitely full fraught with sweet wooddes...and divers other kindes of goodly trees," and colonists could directly be put to work "settyng upp mylles to sawe them" and make boards "ready to be turned into goodly chests, cupboards, stooles, tables, desks, etc." However, on the Tennessee frontier a bed in a backwoods cabin could be as simple as two split rails, two posts, and a rough



Photo: Mike Bell

Mike in front of a 9' diameter Tulip Poplar in Albright Grove in the Great Smokey Mountains of East Tennessee near Gatlinburg.

Woodworking in America Conference & the CFG

We want to remind everybody once again that the Cumberland Furniture Guild has entered into an agreement with the **Woodworking In America** Conference, taking place November 2-4 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The conference, which is put on semi-annually by the folks at *Popular*



Woodworking, is by all accounts an event not to be missed. When any member of the Cumberland Furniture Guild registers for the 3 day WIA conference as a CFG member WIA will donate \$50 of their full conference registration fee to the Cumberland Furniture Guild. A smaller part of a single day registration will also come to the guild. If you are planning on registering, or already have registered without any guild connection, please call Matthew Teague at (615) 330-4439 and the guild will get our share.

headboard nailed to the wall.

Of course hilltop musings among majestic trees in the fall

can inspire poetic, romantic thoughts in the minds of modern hikers. But the reality for a pioneer family involved a lot of backbreaking work, clearing the land for a few meager crops. Liwwat Boke, a German immigrant pioneer in western Ohio, wrote in the 1830s "Houses lie far apart from each other here in the forest. Right up to our doorsill and to those of our neighbors reaches the huge, somber and vaulted forest. There are no openings to break up the overhang, nothing but endless miles upon miles of the shadowy woodland. The great trees tower heavenwards until their individual crowns are lost among the many branches at the top, and the lower branches disappear under the wild growth that chokes the open places between the trunks. Here stand scattered proud beech trees, and pines, hemlocks, balsams and firs; others: oak, chestnut, hickory, ash, walnut, and many rare and unrecognized varieties stand side by side. The sunlight cannot get through the arches of the murmuring leaves... We people from Germany in

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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.



“Old Growth Forests”

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this thick forest feel as if our heads are hooded. All the countryside is monotonous in a tree-strewn land...And further on? No one can say, not even the brave hunters know how far to the West this forest extends.”

The thought of clearing poplar trees nine foot across to grow crops is a daunting proposition. Boke goes on to say “Between the stumps we sow corn, oats and rye, and I have a small garden. Hay we cannot sow yet, there is not yet room.”

As for making a piece of furniture, it sure is a lot easier these days for us to make a trip to the lumber yard, rather than walk into the wilderness with an ax, a pit saw, and a flintlock.

But I am grateful that we still have sanctuaries like the virgin forest of Tennessee where we can take refuge from our hectic digital-click, drive-through world. And when I think about the tree giants in the Albright Grove it hits me: two centuries ago these pioneers dreamed our civilization, and today, we dream their wilderness. **–Mike ♦**



Photo: Mike Bell

Operating water-powered up-and-down sawmill at Old Sturbridge Village where Bell made handmade reproductions of period furniture. The sawmill is a reproduction of the 19th century Nichols-Colby Sawmill of Bow, New Hampshire.

CFG Board Meets to Review Strategic Plan

As you may recall, at our 2010 members’ meeting we began the process of formulating a Five Year Strategic Initiative to provide long term and short term goals for the future of the guild. On August 20th the board met to revisit this plan, to discuss progress made and to make adjustments for the coming year and the next five years. Like the original meeting to develop the plan, this review was facilitated by guild Vice President Alan Daigre, who kept us sharply focused on our goals.

All agreed that progress has been made toward our Five Year Goals, notably in better membership reporting and tabulating, more dynamic events and programs, and expanded exhibition opportunities. It was noted that improvement is still needed in fundraising, in making our various committees more effective and responsive, as well as in following through with better communication and outreach to apply all of the talents our members can bring to the table. Alf reminded us all that one of our primary reasons to exist as a guild is to promote “Excellence” in all our efforts. Two additional goals were also discussed: To create more opportunities to promote makers and the craft. To expand educational opportunities both within the guild and from the guild to the broader community.

As to short term goals (One Year) the guild has established the Project Manager as a part-time paid position (currently filled by Scott Thompson), with an emphasis on coordinating communication and accountability between board members to promote more timely follow-through on board initiatives. We have also improved our email communication with the membership, and are currently working to totally revamp the guild web site to include a number of features we have not had before. Guild member Bob Peters also presented a proposal for an ongoing series of workshops, and was appointed by the board to spearhead that project, which all agreed was a great idea. You will be hearing more about that very soon.

We then documented new or revised one year goals that will be shared with the membership soon. The board plans to make the full Strategic Plan available at the next membership meeting for review and feedback from the membership.

We are really excited about the momentum these planning sessions have brought to the Cumberland Furniture Guild board, and we invite any members who are interested in being more involved to speak to any board member or to email info@cumberlandfurnitureguild.org about applying your talents to the guild on either the board or committee level. **– Thanks All !**