



HISTORY OF THE NORTH ARKANSAS WOODCARVERS CLUB

By Delma Monson

It has been suggested that newer members of the NAWC may be interested in the history of our club from its beginning. And, I being one of the "old-timers" was asked to ponder the past and write about it. To squeeze eighteen years into a few paragraphs may take some doing, but as memory serves me, here goes...

C.K. "Mac" McCormick, a retired engineer from Teletype Corp. in Des Plaines, IL, was also a hobbyist woodcarver who taught art in the Chicago area. He moved to Mountain Home in 1970 and continued his hobby. Soon, he and another retired friend from Teletype, Ellis Mitchell, "got their heads together" about starting a beginners woodcarving class in Mountain Home.

They placed an article in the Baxter Bulletin newspaper in November 1973. The response was enthusiastic. So, on January 8, 1974 the first ten-week course began with twenty-two men and women novices. The fee was \$10, which included a knife and several blanks to start on. The "Penguin" blanks finished looked more like ducks or geese. But with time we improved. Later two other blanks of stylized animals were given to us (elephant, rhino, hippo or a bull). They were all cut from basswood or Honduras mahogany. Later, aspen and sycamore were used.

At first, classes were held at the Parish Hall of St. Peter's Catholic Church. At one of our first potluck picnics, in August 1974, officers were nominated and the club was established in September. Meetings were held at the First Presbyterian Church with programs related to carving. The club Constitution and By-Laws were written by Ed Baierbach, according to Robert Rules. At the time it was the only registered Chapter of the National Woodcarvers Association in Arkansas. Our first President was James Blackburn; Vice Presidents were Ellis Mitchell and Jeanette Driver; Secretary-Treasurer was Harry Bohart and Directors were "Mac", Ed Baierbach and Delma Monson. Dues were voted to be \$3.00 a year.

The first theme for the class's carving project was "Religions of the World". Each member carved one or more figures or animals in a

Nativity Scene, besides other religious figures of the world. We strove to complete them before Christmas of 1974. That was when we had our first group of exhibits. One was a Nativity scene in the window of Centennial Bookstore on Main Street. Several carvings were also placed at First National and Peoples banks. Other locations used were Lorentz's Paint Store, where we bought most of our supplies.

We had some poster publicity and Louise Fleming and Janet Nelson of the Baxter Bulletin also gave us a number of good write-ups, which started to acquaint the community with our Club's existence. "Mac" added a number of his own carvings to our exhibit: a head of a Syrian (representing the Moslem religion); a head of an Aztec warrior (representing human sacrifice); a head of Confucius (Chinese); a head of Hindu fire god Agni (India) and an African Spirit mask, as well as a number of monks and madonnas.

When America celebrated its Bicentennial in 1976, our Club chose that as a theme and many wonderful and unusual carvings resulted and were exhibited. Excellent poster publicity was done in later years by Connie Lutes and Veronica Hambleton. We also had displays at Cedar Grill Gift Shop on Main St. and at Baxter County Library.

For a number of years the club had classes, carving sessions and some meetings at the community Center, but when the rent there became higher than our small treasury could bear (Jan. 1981) a member negotiated with the Board of the Presbyterian Church on Hwy. 201 North and we were permitted to hold meetings and carve in their Fellowship Hall for many years. Our membership grew steadily under the tireless direction and support of many faithful members.

Carving at the church ended (more or less voluntarily) however, when the hall was carpeted. It was through the influence of Fred Clark and Angus Ireby that we were invited to have carving sessions every Thursday at the V.F.W. Hall. During summer months many of us met to carve at the Pavilion in Old Hickory Park.

In May 1980 a poster contest was offered to our High School Art Classes. Prizes of \$10, \$5 and \$3 were given for the students' work selected by a group of art judges. The posters were used to publicize our exhibit that year.

Besides publicity in local media, pictures of our various exhibits, and especially some of Dale Berke's work, were shown in the National Woodcarvers Association magazine, Chip Chats.

Over the years we had many exhibits, repeats at the local banks and Lorentz's, at the old, renovated Frisco Railroad Station in Mammoth Springs. We had an exhibit, jointly with another club in the Mammoth Springs area and with a Springfield, MO club at Forsythe, Mo. Others were at the Village Mall, on the Baxter County Courthouse square, the Methodist Church (On Main St. at the present site of the Mountain Home Baptist Church), the Presbyterian Church and in recent years at the V.F.W. Hall.

We have had many well-know carvers demonstrate and speak at our meetings. Some of who are: Bob Holtby of Harrison (Indians and

boots); Paul Ludke (gunstocks); Les Suchman (fish and birds); Bill Spratt (wood sculpture); Terry Denton (miniatures); James and Caroline Cushing of Mountain View (waterfowl); Dwight Williams (antique tools); Bill Fuerst (pipes from Briarwood); Ted Hughes; Wildwood carvers of Mountain View; Jimmy Nelson (faces); Eva Miller; Harold Enlow; Violet Hensley; L.D. "Cookie" Cook (waterfowl); Peter Engler; Dale Berke; Bob Draznik; Ed Baierback; Rudy Mrva; John Fisher; Ida Engler (a distinguished collector of carvings and an honorary member of our club); Orville Oaks (a highly regarded specialist in the study of woods from over the world); Wayne Moore (an expert on tool sharpening); and others.

A number of spectacular, beautiful carvings have been given as gifts by individual carvers and by the club as a whole. Some of which have been: a Celtic Cross 36" x 60", donated by Ed Baierback to Cotter Methodist Church; an Aumbry (a chamber for reserve consecrated bread) and several crosses worn by Alter Boys were donated by Lester Dutton to the Episcopal Church; Corbels made by Mac and Wayne Moore were donated to the Presbyterian Church; a plaque by Ray Graffin was given to the Presbyterian Church. Monetary gifts have also been given to the Presbyterian Church for the privilege of using their hall. Donations were also made to the Presbyterian Church Women's Scholarship Fund in 1976.

The gift of a carving book to our County Library, in memory of a deceased member, was started in May 1976 after the death of our first president, Jim Blackburn. In the years since, a fine collection of books has accumulated and will be available for all time.

In December 1988, Lloyd "Sid" Sidwell contributed a carved hunting dog. In walnut, as a representation of our club, to be included with other items from local firms and organizations, in a 50-year time capsule. It was buried in front of City Hall on Hickory St.