

# The Wood Bee Carver

By DONALD K. MERTZ Wilmington, Ohio *"Reprinted by permission from CHIP CHATS"*

## Carving "Whittle Folk"

THE Wood Bee Carver's philosophy is: "Would be carvers would be carvers if they would carve wood." Inherent in this philosophy is the proven reality of the assumption that one learns by doing. The more one does, the more one learns. The mystery is in the way the creative subconscious Works through the experience of trial and error to a gradual improvement of skill and style.

The hardest part of any carving project is getting started. Once begun, the creative juices flow, the Carver gets captured by the carving Muse and the project takes on life and expression.

The Wood Bee Carver also believes from the school of experience that there is no correct way to do the Carving process. Each Carver is to develop one's own approach, technique and style. The goal being not to be just a duplicator of someone else's Style, but to learn from the experience of another. In other words, don't be a student of a teacher, but a student of observation learning from many teachers. Teacher, in this sense, is the informal learning from fellow carvers and studying various styles and interpretations in carvings. This is part of the school of self-taught learning that comes

from observation coupled with trial and error of self experience.

So, as the Wood Bee Carver offers descriptions, illustrations, it is to be received as one carver's way of carving. Such is only a suggestion as a stepping stone to developing one's own way, ones own style and one's own interpretation. If only one small insight is gained from this discussion, then it has added to the file of creative resources in any carver's creative library of self taught knowledge.

The subject being considered is Caricature carvings called 'Whittle Folk" carved in the hillbilly motif of the Appalachian and Ozark Mountain tradition. The Wood Bee Carver prefers using a pocketknife with a blade in the shape of Whamcliffe or beak point. Because the carving is Small, a narrow blade of a quarter of an inch Wide is used.

To carve human caricatures, it is helpful to be observant of how they stand, how clothes wrinkle and the basic shape of the human form. When it comes to faces and hands, one can study one's own face in the mirror or one's own hand.



Examples of "Whittle Folk" by the author; figures are approximately three inches tall.

To make the caricature appear more than a stick figure, put movement into the carving like the letter S. The eyes follow the curve along the snaking line. This is why the female nude has been for centuries a subject of art for the gentle, pleasing flow of curving lines. When one envisions a carving as an "S" rather than an "I" it will look alive rather than a decorated telephone pole.

Looking for the flow of lines is to be observant of the bends in human anatomy: bend of the elbow, knee, waist, neck, wrist, fingers and turned up toes. It is to see the corners of the mouth, cheek bones, hill and valley, arch of the eyebrow and the slant and curve off the nose. The same is carved into the hair and beard. Right angles or square corners are all rounded to add to the illusion of flowing lines. Wrinkles and folds in hat and clothes follow the same S motif. These should not be overdone, only enough to simulate or have the appearance so that the eyes do not get lost in the details. Some of the cuts will create shadows, giving depth and movement to the illusion. Facets left by the whittling blade produce light and shadows.

To produce a carving of "Whittle Folk" is to use only a knife. As stated earlier, a narrow Wharnclyffe blade is preferred, although any Carver Should use what is most comfortable. There are six basic kinds of cuts used, described in the following glossary of terms:

- **Peeling Cut;** This is just like peeling a potato, slicing the wood as a shaving. [This cut used in roughing out and shaping.]
- **Stop Cut:** Using the point of the blade like a pencil to cut a shallow cut perpendicular into the wood as if drawing a line.
- **Angled Cut:** The point of the blade cutting in towards the bottom of the stop cut at an angle, on either side of the stop cut line, following the line from beginning to end. [This cut is used in hair and beard detail, separating fingers and detailing.]
- **Chip Cut:** Making two perpendicular stop cuts as if making the letter "V" with the point of the blade deepest where the two cuts meet and then an angled cut with the point of the blade entering the wood at the open end of the "V" and ending at the bottom of the "V" to create a triangled chip when removed. (This cut is used in carving eyes, mouth, ears, seat of pants.)
- **Notch Cut:** Made with two cuts of the blade or two angled cuts as in making a shaped notch or in some cases a letter "L" shaped notch. (This cut is used in roughing out, under nose, lips, shoes, clothes wrinkles.)
- **Skewed Concave:** A cut similar to a peeling cut, with the blade at a skewed angle when pushed or pulled and sliced with a rolling out action to create a dished out effect. (This cut is used to create waves in hair and beard, folds in clothes and hat, and gives the flowing "S" shape effect.)

Whittle Folk begin as an inch square, three-inch tall block of basswood. Guidelines of the caricature are drawn on the wood as a way to plan ahead as to what wood is to be removed. This does not have to be an accurate drawing and should be larger than the final carving. Guidelines will be boxy in appearance. After the carving is roughed out, then the boxy areas are carved to detail. Draw the side views, front and back keeping the "S" line in mind. The goal, when finished, is to have a caricature doing something like holding something in its hands. A carved hand is more appealing than one hidden in a pocket.

The Caricature illustrated is a fisherman holding a catch in one hand and fishing pole in the other. The goal of incorporating the "S" line into angles and curves is accomplished in the following plan of design:

- Hat Sits askew on back of head
- Arms and hands bent
- Knees bent, one leg ahead of the other. front leg bent at knee and back leg with less of a bend
- Trunk leaning slightly forward from waist up, head slightly bent upward
- Toes of Shoes upturned
- Fishing pole angled in line starting at left eye down to the Outer edge of left shoe

Begin roughing out by making notch cuts and peeling cuts under the hat brim at the corners, gradually removing wood all around the brim with the most wood removed on the sides and front of what will be the head and hair. Work around the guideline of the upper end of what will be the fishing pole, leaving the pole for later.

Rough shape the rest of the hat with notch and peeling cuts, leaving the brim fairly thick as it is a weak area due to cross grain cutting. Brim will be one of the last areas thinned and shaped in final detailing. Later, when final shaping is done, the bowl of the hat should be equal with where the head enters it.

Back of the knees are roughed out with notch and peeling cuts. Outline the right arm holding the string of fish with stop cuts and angled cuts, leaving extra wood for later shaping. Do the same with the left arm, hand and fishing pole, leaving the pole somewhat larger for later detailing. Beginning on the right side of the front. Working over to the stop cut of the fishing pole, make notch and peeling cuts to rough shape the feet and front legs. At the knee and towards where the beard meets the crotch, make notch and peeling cuts. The inside of the legs are rough shaped by making a series of cuts over and over again in the sequence of a stop cut beginning at the crotch down to where the feet are, and then shallow angled cuts on both sides of the stop cut.

Repeat the process several times to form a channel between the legs. On the back side do the same with a stop cut beginning at seat of pants and ending through where the heels of feet meet and then shallow angled cuts on both sides of stop cut. Working alternatively from the front and back, eventually the legs will be separated. Carefully make similar cuts to separate the area between the feet. The seat of the pants is formed by making the "V" chip cut with the deepest part of the "V" being at the top line where the separated legs come together.

The same process of separating the legs is used to separate the fishing pole below the hand down to where it will touch the left shoe. Making small and careful cuts, the left leg will be separated from the fishing pole. Still keep the pole thick.

With a series of stop and peeling angled cuts, shape the inside crook of the left arm and upper part of fishing pole, leaving pole attached to what will be the beard. Under the left forearm make notch and peeling cuts to shape the outside of left leg. The left hand is rough shaped as a box around the fishing pole a little larger than the width of the arm, to be shaped later.

Roughed out to basic shape, each area is ready to be shaped to detail. Starting with the left foot and leg, which will be the back leg, almost straight with a slight bend at knee. begin to shape the foot into a shoe, keeping fishing pole attached to side of shoe. Reduce and shape the left pants leg from the front and each side with minimal shaping of the back of the leg. Pants cuffs are made with a notch cut in an angled line from top of shoe downward to just above the heel.

Shape the shoe with notch cuts to show off the sole and heel, making the toe of shoe upturned.

Right foot and leg is forward with greater bend at knee and the string of fish attached to the pants leg. Shape and reduce the back of the leg so that it is ahead of left leg, being careful where the right arm touches. Reduce and shape the sides and front of right leg, make cuff and carve the right Shoe which will be slightly ahead of other Shoe. While Shaping the legs, the arms may also be shaped, but leave the hands, fish and pole for later. The arms taper in from the elbow up through the shoulders under the draping of long hair.

To carve the facial details it may be helpful to draw pencil lines showing the front hair line, position of nose, eyes, mustache and beard. Begin by making the hair line around face with Stop cuts and angled cuts. Notch under nose and angle nose toward eyebrow line with a notch that levels out the forehead under the hair line.

On each side of the bridge of the nose make a triangle chip cut. Make another triangle chip cut for the outside Corner of eye. Starting at the point of the triangle chip at the bridge of the nose make an arching notch cut connecting with the outside triangle chip to form eyebrow ridge.

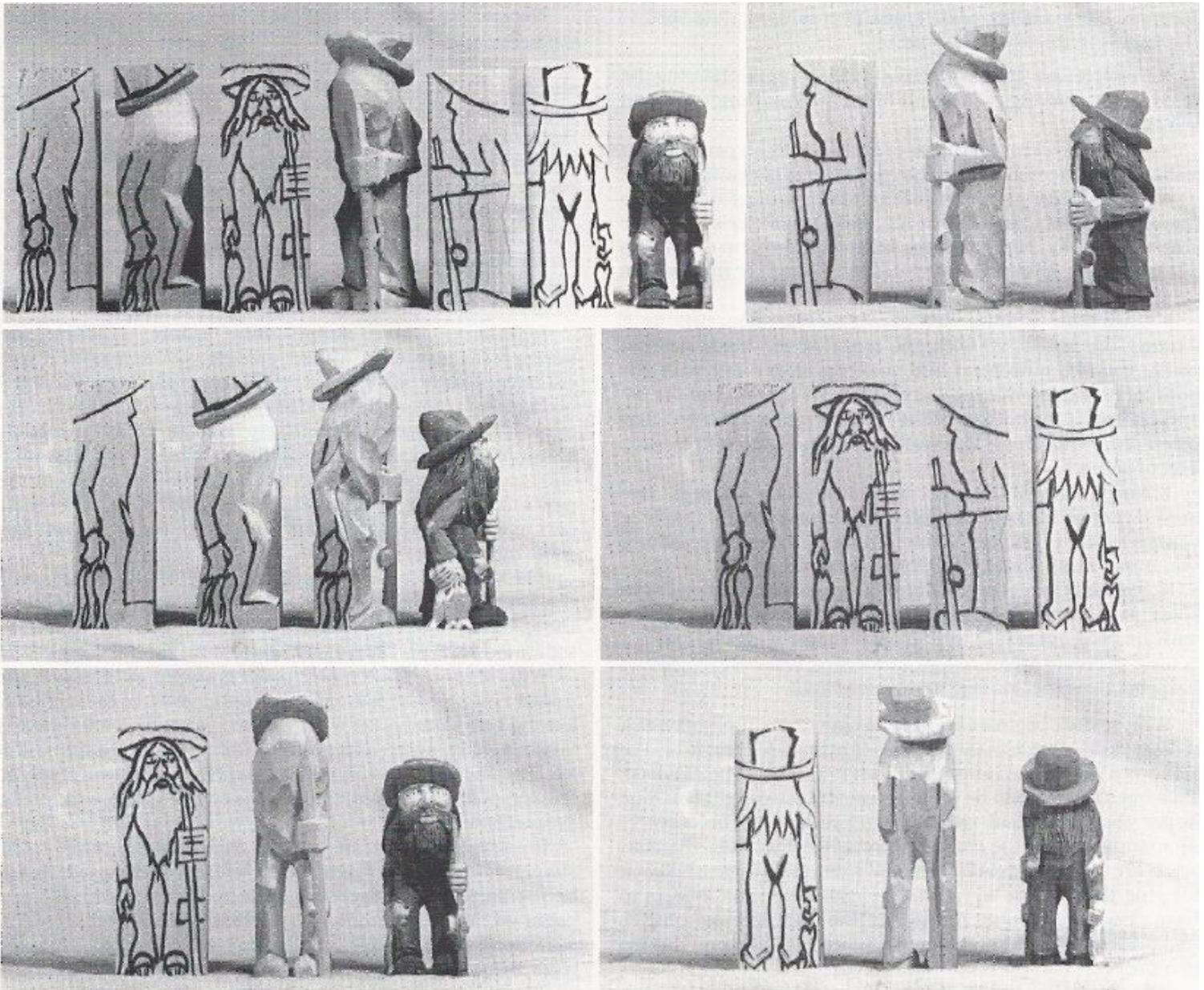
At outer corners of the nostrils make a notched cut to form top of mustache. Make a notch cut on each Side of nose beginning at mangled chip of eye down to mustache notch. From mustache up to the eyebrow arch make small peeling Cuts that allow the nose to stand out from the cheeks. A notch out is made along an imaginary line between mouth and ear. between mustache and hair to form the beard and the valley below the cheek bone.

Starting again at the point of the triangle chip at the bridge of the nose, make an arching notch cut to meet; reverse to other triangle chip to form the bottom of eye. Shape the mound of the eye to look like a bloated football. To make the eyelids and eyeballs, repeat the triangle chips, slightly smaller than the first ones on both sides of the eye.

Make a smaller football shape with stop and angled cuts: the semblance of an eye should appear. Taking small, gentle peeling cuts, round the eyeball between the triangle chips and stop cuts of the eyelids.

Shape the nose with peeling cuts and skewed concave cuts.

The mouth is formed with a stop cut under the mustache the same width of broadest part of nose and a Steep angled

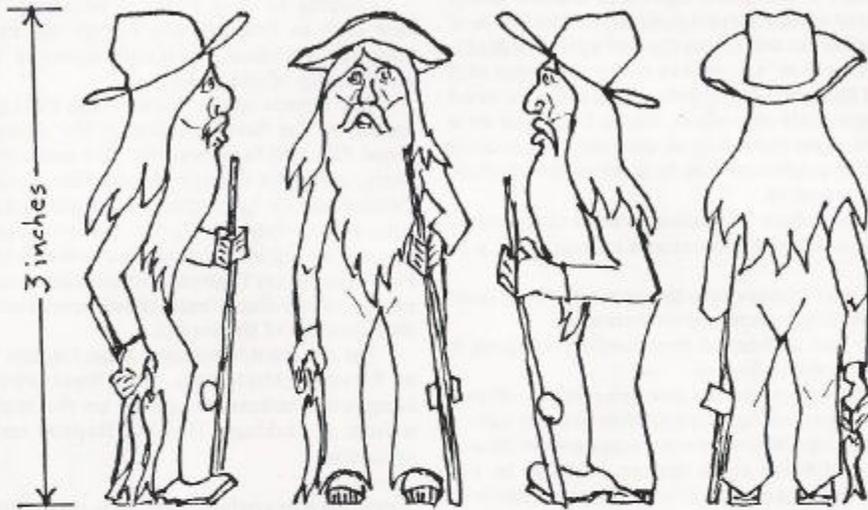


Step-by-step progress in whittling "Whittle Folk."



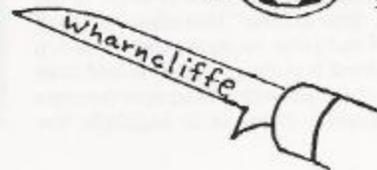
# WHITTLE FOLK

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- SEQUENCE TO MAKE EYES
- 1 ◀
  - 2 ◀ ▶
  - 3 ◀ ▶
  - 4 ◯
  - 5 ◯
  - 6 ◯
  - 7 ◯
  - 8 ◯

◀ = triangle Chip



and arching cut to form the top of the bottom lip. Where the mouth openings end make a triangle Chip at each Corner followed by a notch cut under bottom lip. This is done a couple of times to shape the bottom lip. mustache drape at the corners of the mouth and the beard following the contour of the chin. Shape beard with peeling and skewed concave cuts, working around the still attached wood on the fishing pole.

Eyebrows, mustache, hair and beard are detailed with endless Series of stop cuts and angled cuts to give the simulance of hair. These stop cuts should be staggered, stair stepped and follow the "S" motif. The angled cut Corning into the side of the stop cut will create light and shadow giving depth and movement to hair. Experiment to see which side of the stop cut an angled cut will create the perception of depth.

In carving the hands, it is helpful to study ends own as if holding a string of fish and fishing pole, duplicating the bend of fingers and their stair-step effect. Carve the hand as a series of flat planes, then carve fingers with stop cut between knuckles, followed by angled cuts on both sides of stop cuts, rounding off the outer edges.

With peeling cuts, reduce the fishing pole to shape using care where the pole and hand connect and in separating pole from beard.

Fish are carved with similar care to appear hanging away from pants, yet touching somewhere underneath.

The brim of the hat is thinned Very Carefully, shaping it with wavy lines and upturned areas.

Wrinkles, folds in clothes and hat, patches and torn elbows and knees complete the carving. The goal is to have no fuzz or scrappy errant cut marks. When a cut goes against the flow of the grain, rough and fuzzy areas appear, so carve in the opposite direction. One simply has to experiment to discover the direction of cut that produces the best result. Taking Small, gentle cuts results in clean facets, angles and curves.

If the Carver chooses a natural finish for the figure, which is appealing in Showing off the carving detail and beauty of the wood, the first procedure is to clean the carving of the soiled and dirty areas on the high points. Some of the dirty areas can be gently cleaned with peeling cuts, then wash the carving with a clean rag soaked with lacquer thinner. This may take a couple of times. Two coats of Deft [clear wood finish) applied with small artist brush give a nice finish.

To add contrast to natural finish, a very small amount of burnt umber oil paint from a tube thinned with mineral spirits or turpentine can be brushed on and then wiped off, leaving the crevices a little darker than the high points.

Experimenting the Carver could first brush on a wash coat of mineral spirits or turpentine, followed by a wash coat of thinned burnt umber, wiped off. if too dark, wipe off with rag soaked with the thinning medium.

Experimentation is the key to desired result. When dry, the carving is finished with two coats of Deft.

If the Carver chooses to paint the caricature, then the face. hands and exposed flesh receive two Coats of Deft. Shoes. pants, shirt, hat. hair, fish and pole receive colors of choice. The paint medium is acrylic that Comes in small jars from craft Stores. Place a couple of drops of c0101' chosen on a plastic coffee can lid. thin with a few drops of water. With small artist brushes administer a thin coat of color to the area. The goal is to have a "hint of color" that allows grain of wood to Show through. If the color appears Washed out, a Second thin coat can be added. It is always easier to add than it is to take away. A thick coat of paint that is opaque destroys the effect of light and shadow. Color to highlight the carving not draw attention to itself.

Using imagination and experimentation, Whittle Folk can be carved holding musical instruments, animals in arms. hunters with gun and game, leaning on shovel or ax, farmer with hat in hand and hoe in other, or carved as a carpenter. plumber, mechanic, policeman, barber, traveling salesman. painter, Cowboy, Indian` pool player, Sports caricature . . . the ideas await imagination's exploration. The key is to try and as one tries the better the results. Who knows. Whittle Folk may grow up to be larger caricatures and Sculptured figures.

**DISCLAIMER:** since this article was first written a more preferred method of coloration has been adopted as described in "PAINTING SOFTLY" as it appears in BEE HIVE. This is the method now recommended. "Reprinted by permission from CHIP CHATS"