

Whittle folk 'pokes --- second generation

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By DONALD K. MERTZ
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WHITTLE Folk 'Pokes are a continuation of growth in the Wood Bee Carver's motto: "Would bee carvers would be carvers if they would carve Wood." In this motto is the implied experience and observation that one learns by doing. In this learning process there is the potential of improvement in design and execution of technique.

Whittle Folk 'Pokes first appeared in Chip Chats September-October, 1996, pages 32-35, with a detailed description for Whittle-Carving Western figures. The new examples accompanying this article reflect a refining of design and a variety in The Subject matter. As one Carves, new ideas pop up through the subconscious process of creativity and the actual practice of Whittle-Carving.

Whittle-Carving means carving only with knives in the technical definition of Whittling: a hand-held carving Shaped only with knives. The Challenge of Whittle-Carving is to Shape a Carving figure that has the appearance of being carved with traditional Carving tools. Additional challenge is in the size of the carving subject in that Whittle Folk 'Pokes are Whittle-Carved out of a four-inch tall by three-quarter inch Square block of Wood. Working in this almost miniature scale utilizes Whittling cuts that create contrasts of light and shadow through hard lines complementing the softer lines of form with flowing lines.



Whittle folk 'pokes are a challenge to carve from one piece of wood with just a knife.
Photos by Charles Leverett of Albertville, Ala. May-June 1998

A further challenge is to carve the subject out of one piece of wood with no glued add-ons. Also challenging are body posture, turn of the head and exposed hands normally holding something. Thus there are carvings within the Carving that detail each part of the Carving. For example, a cowpoke holding a saddle bag draped over an arm and the other hand holding onto the vest or thumb in belt. The saddle bag motif is a separate carving project of second generation the larger project as is the thumb in belt, or hand holding vest being separate carving projects.

The pistol and gun belt, rifle, hand holding rope, bandanna, shirt collar, pocket on chaps are all separate carvings Within the larger carving. To accomplish these it always helps to practice each of these on a practice stick. It is a matter of planning ahead by leaving enough Wood in the given areas to accomplish the desired outcome as in the example of a pipe in the corner of the cowpoke's mouth that rests for support on the beard.

Facial and body proportions were described in the September-October, '96, article of Chip Chats which may be used for reference. This article will talk more about design features. The two subjects highlighted in the color photos, with one cowpoke holding a coffee cup and the other leaning on a rifle, along with the other photos showing additional design ideas, are all similar and yet distinct in and of themselves.

Depth of perception is achieved by deep undercutting which creates a good shadow with a sense of movement. An undercut around the cuff of shirt sleeve allows the wrist to appear to be going into the shirt sleeve. It is a little thing but its effect adds to reality.

Slicing cuts and using the tip end of the cutting edge of the knife are used primarily in all the detail shaping. Slice, slice and slice are constantly to be utilized for clean and sharp cuts. [For a discussion of Whittle cuts, refer to previous article "On the Cutting Edge," January-February, '98 Chip Chats.)

Plan to strengthen Weak areas that Could break. The hat brim is Very delicate as it is a thin section of end grain on the top and bottom of the brim. It appears to be thinner than it actually is by chamfering or beveling the edge of the brim. Think of it as bringing the edge to almost a point much like the cutting edge of the knife blade is thinner than the thickest part of the back edge of the knife blade. The same principle is utilized in deep undercutting of the vest from the shirt with the thinnest being only at the edge. The same is done with the chaps looking thinner at the edge but thicker where chaps meet pants. Attach small

delicate items to neighboring parts like the smoking pipe attached to beard, cup in hand attached to vest, drawn pistol attached to vest and coil of rope attached to chaps.

Soft wrinkles and gouged, dished-out effects are created by using a narrow blade whose shape has the cutting edge curved up to the straight back edge at the point of the blade. In the areas to create a concave, dished-out effect, think of the edge of the knife as being like an ice skate. As the Cutting edge is sliced on the edge like an ice skate, gently twist the blade towards its side allowing the cutting edge to do the Work of shaving a slice of Wood leaving a gouged out area. Concentrate on using more of the tip end of the blade rather than the heel area. This is how soft folds and wrinkles are created in shirt, bandanna, chaps and waves in hair and beard.



Artistic movement of exaggerated realism is created in the flowing, Haring, draping, gapping and overlapping lines of vest, bandanna and Chaps. There is a concerted effort to have few straight lines. The twist of the head, one leg bent at knee with other straighter, upturned toes of boots and positioning of the hands create a life-like figure captured in a photographic moment of a pensive mood.

Whittle Folk 'Pokes are colored with, a patina oil finish using artist oil paint thinned with boiled linseed oil. A base coat over the entire figure is a mixture of raw Sienna and boiled linseed oil. Immediately the other colors are added on top of base coat using oil paint thinned with boiled linseed oil in the Colors desired. This method was developed by professional Carver John Heatwole of Bridgewater, Va., as described in the March-April '87 issue of Fine Woodworking magazine.

All in all, Whittle-Carving is like any carving, a lot of practice that leads to another idea to pursue with different hat Styles, different Styles of mustache and beard, different poses, different outfits leading to a learning by doing or as said before: "Would be carvers would be carvers if they would carve wood."

Donald K. Mertz lives in Wilmington, Ohio.