

August 25 through October 20, 2019

# *The Stories Continue*

an exhibition of woodcarvings  
by Lindsborg carvers –  
curated by John Presley

## Exhibition Statement:

Anton Pearson, John Altenborg, and Norman Malm have each left a well-known legacy of woodcarving in Lindsborg. However, these iconic artists built on traditions brought to the Smoky Valley by Swedish immigrants who applied their skills to creating farm tools, cooking utensils, decorative items and images. The settlers themselves came out of a culture in which they met their needs by crafting wooden objects, sometimes only using a knife and an axe. The development of such skill was a result of convenience and necessity. Wood was a readily available resource and at one point during Danish rule in Norway, the king declared that common people could not use sophisticated tools. Consequently, things such as hinges, clamps and even shoes were crafted out of wood.<sup>1</sup>



Grandpa's Pride and Joy by  
Bruce Harding

There were, of course, other well-known carvings such as those found on Viking ships and Stave churches. While trained craftsmen initially created these pieces, other, untrained people replicated some similar works and added their own touches.<sup>2</sup>

This exhibit demonstrates the continued interest and practice of the carving traditions brought to the Smoky Valley. It contains utilitarian pieces, decorative works and representational carvings of people and animals. It also illustrates how untrained people have developed their interests along the lines established by their Lindsborg predecessors.

Each carver and piece has their own story, but all are part of a long tradition of the relationship between people and wood.

- John Presley

(The references noted are from *Scandinavian Figure Carvings*, by Harley Refsal 2015)

## Artist Statements:

### **Marv Anderson**

Observation is fundamental to influence. Adaption is an individual's ability to personally express what has been observed. Growing up in Lindsborg, I had the opportunity to observe and enjoy the visual art of Anton Pearson, Oscar Gunnarson, Dr. Birger Sandzén, Lester Raymer, and others. I took art lessons from Richard Luster and Rosemary Laughlin.

Using an inexpensive carving tool set, my first attempt at relief carving was in 1972, when I created Christmas tree plaques that represented significant family events for each year. I had no training in relief carving and there was no ability to Google instructions. While relief carvings can be museum quality, my carvings have always been for personal enjoyment for my family and have never been sold.

### **Jennifer Ebling**

I am a local girl, born and raised in Lindsborg. I have always been crafty, and have never been one to settle on a specific craft. There was always something else that would grab my attention and not let go. It always seemed to be something that was just a little out of the ordinary, for someone in my age range. Being of Swedish descent, living in Lindsborg, my heritage has always been something that I was proud of. The Swedish carvings had always been something I admired. It was a craft I could look at but never make, something too difficult or too complex. It was at a Midsummer's Festival that I met John Presley. He was sitting in his booth carving away, happily chatting with whoever would stop long enough to talk. I spent quite a while talking with him. It was that day I decided to take a class from him and learn to carve. The first day, after only a few hours, we each had carved a simple little man. I've been hooked ever since.

### **Bruce Harding**

Bruce Harding is a retired biology instructor with a BS degree from Bethany College and a MS degree from Utah University. Bruce is a self-taught carver and took up carving as a hobby in about 2000. His wood carvings are made from basswood (linden) and finished with acrylic paint, boiled linseed oil, and a flat latex varnish.

### **Roger Harmon**

My father was a "wood carver" and primarily carved sculptures of people – he had no interest in carving wildlife decoys. When I asked him to carve a decoy he said, "If you want a decoy, carve it yourself." I started carving decoys in 1997 when my father was dying of cancer and brought a Mallard head for him to see. He was impressed and I was encouraged.

I carved with a NASA friend when we lived in Houston, Texas, and did some carving with Mike Bonner and his group of championship carvers in New Orleans. Members of this group regularly presented and often won Best of Show in the class at the World Decoy Show in Atlantic City, New Jersey. When we lived in Round Rock, Texas, I carved with a group who produced a variety of items, none of which were wildfowl.

I do not carve for sale, but for recreation. The Green Wing Teal decoy displayed is an early work carved in basswood. The Meadowlark was done for my mother and is carved from Tupelo. Tupelo is a very soft wood found in the bayous along the Gulf Coast. It carves easily and does not "fuzz" if you use a small power grinder and floats naturally when placed in water. It is my preferred medium and the primary wood used by decoy carvers in Louisiana and along the Gulf Coast. Basswood seems to be preferred by those carving in the northern United States.

My carvings are all created with a knife and wood burner. Feathers are laid out and carved into the bird. Then a small wood burner and hand grinder are used to give the feathers texture.

### **Barbara Hoffman**

Barbara Hoffman began carving regularly when she saw how simple tools and techniques could enhance the tole painting designs she was using on wood. When she moved to Lindsborg in the early 1970s, she learned more carving techniques and practiced them by carving a collection of Santa Claus ornaments and figurines. Since then, she has carved more than thirty of them.

Two of her greatest sources of inspiration are the original wood trim in her house, built by Swedish carpenters in the late 1800s, and the oak chairs in her dining room. When she carved the Acanthus Leaf Shelf (2019), she adapted the shelf design to harmonize with the swirl pattern on the back of the chairs. She plans to hang the shelf on her dining room wall and

place a small clock on it. In the future, she hopes to continue doing more Scandinavian-inspired decorative carving.

### **Mark Kozubowski**

I purchased my first cane in Pennsylvania more than 30 years ago. I've since collected canes and walking-sticks from Ireland, Poland, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico and Scotland. I became interested in wood carving after taking a course from the great Lindsborg wood carver Norman Malm. Since then, I've crafted canes and walking-sticks from a wide variety of woods, including Bradford Pear, Black Walnut, Cherry, Maple, Corkscrew Willow, Diamond Willow, and Tulip Poplar. I'm one of the few people in town not allowed to go to the bone yard; my wife says I bring more branches back than I take out.

### **Jim Malm:**

Jim Malm's woodcarving roots run deep. Born in Lindsborg, the son of Norman and Rosemary Pearson Malm, artistic endeavors surrounded him throughout his childhood. Jim's maternal grandfather, well known Swedish-American woodcarver Anton Pearson, provided early inspiration. Countless hours spent in Anton's Main Street Studio with his father, Norman, also a talented woodcarver and cartoonist, sharpened Jim's interest and skills. Today Jim carries on the family woodcarving tradition. He continues carving Norman's signature Swedish Tomte figures, honoring his father yet making them his own.

### **Leland Nelson:**

These wooden salad utensils were carved by Leland Nelson. They are folk art forms made from local materials. The spoon is made from locally harvested white oak that Leland helped saw into boards at a sawmill located southwest of Lindsborg, some 40 years ago. The walnut came from a board from Dr. Duane Fredrickson's farm southeast of Lindsborg. The finish is hand rubbed mineral oil which is food safe and unlike vegetable or animal oil, won't turn rancid. Leland was born in Lindsborg in 1947 and is a lifetime Lindsborg area resident. Leland was inspired to try carving after taking a flat carving class from John Presley.

### **John Palmquist**

I began carving birds around 1965, about the same time I became a bird watcher. My first attempt was a pair of juncos, which I still have. Over the years I have carved over 80 birds, but have very few in my possession because I have given them away to family and friends. Carving has always been a relaxing hobby for me. Occasionally, people would ask me if I sold them. The answer was always "No!" That would take the fun out of it.

Early on, I bought some Tom Wolfe books and learned to carve following his patterns. One that is well worn is "Santa and Friends" which provided me with ideas for numerous Christmas ornaments and figures. I have carved whales, dolphins, and sharks, as well as Northwest Indian designs. At one time I carved bunches of little Dala horses and gave them to my students as graduation gifts. Then I tried little Swedish roosters and even some pigs. I used to target shoot with friends and for a while I carved wooden gun grips for their pistols. It's fun to try different things and experiment a little.

I have never considered myself an artist, but I do know that the more I carved, the better my pieces turned out. Carving, for me, is the best part and I enjoy burning in the feathering on the birds. Basswood is my favorite carving material.

### **John Presley**

One of my early memories after moving to Lindsborg was the impact of Anton Pearson's carvings. He was able to bring personality and character to the ordinary people he carved.

Many evoked the humor emerging from simple circumstances and all demonstrated a connection with the lives of the people around him. He was able to accomplish this without having to go into great detail in the carvings, leaving the story to be told by the viewer.

Many years later, I found a book by Harley Refsal, which helped me understand the process of this kind of story telling through the flat-plan carving technique. Simple, sometimes rough people were able to share their stories in ways that reflected their lives. This primitive style of carving allows me to avoid making things “perfect” and actually encourages me to let the “flaws” be a part of what is being shared.

Since that time, I’ve enjoyed being able to whittle out story lines, which other people fill in out of their experience and perception.



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