

The One And Only Monthly Newsletter of the Eugene 5160 Club

November Meeting: Thursday the 4th at 6pm
at the Woodcraft store on Coburg Road, Eugene



Note from the editor: Due to circumstances beyond his control: there is no Wayne's World this month.

Wayne Goddard opened the October meeting with a few jokes about Robert's Rules of Order - mentioned that it looks good for doing another hammer-in at Moldy Jim's place next Spring - and noted that his publisher has asked him to work up a revised version of "The Wonder of Knifemaking" over the next couple of months.

One of the folks had brought in a variety of wood blocks that would make good handle material for give-aways. Wayne proceeded to parcel out the blocks as prizes for longest commute and answers to challenge questions he threw out to the group. I got a booby prize for a comment I made. I'll never learn! Got a couple of nice chunks of walnut out of it though.

Woodcraft offered the group a box of short, thick, metal blades to anyone who wanted them. They also requested participation in their Fall sale and demo event... and asked if we'd be interested in putting something about the group (and a sample knife) in an in-store display. Keith Johnson and I participated in the sale/demo event (more on that below). If we find out more about the in-store display I can put something together for that.

After some general discussion Wayne introduced the guest presenter for the meeting: John Norem, an outstanding carver and engraver. Unfortunately John took umbrage (in the clearest terms) at my taking photos of his work - as he is putting together an art book and does not want any photos leaking out - so I've sent the few photos that I took of his work to the great bit bucket in the sky. Which is your loss if you missed the meeting since he does remarkable work.

John had no problem with my taking notes for the newsletter, so I'll relay something of his presentation.

John started out by noting that in knife collecting, even experts may overlook a good find: John purchased a couple of Persian style knives at the OKCA show a few years back. One with a ram's head and the other with a ewe's head and both with what seemed to be jade handles. I didn't get all the details, but he had several experts assess them and all agreed that the handles were jade - and set their estimate accordingly - but missed the emeralds, diamonds, and rubies in the hilt - which doubled their value!

John shared that he began whittling at ten and has kept with it during military service and on through his life. This is not a new passion.

Then he started doling out examples of his work for us to pass around. This ranged from knife handle carving to a couple of different styles of embossing of glass to open work wood carvings. Very delicate, precise, and impressive work. John is fond of Celtic knotwork and incorporates it into much of his art.

From there John went into the craft itself - the demands it makes and the tools he prefers. He emphasized repeatedly that a light touch is required - such that if you practice on your thumb nail you should be able to remove a shaving without feeling it. Maybe 1/2 pound of pressure on the cutting tool. He makes extensive use of straight chisels with a rounded face. He showed us several of his favorite chisels and tools and the techniques he uses for ends and corners in the engraved pattern. John noted that if the wood "rings" when struck, you can bet that it will take fine detail carving. If it has a dull sound when struck it probably won't support much detail.

And a #5 lead pencil and eraser. Draw and erase, draw and erase, until you've got the pattern you really want before picking up a cutting tool.

The discussion turned to the wood itself, and views were shared on how fiddleback pattern develops in the tree. Pistol butt, wind stress, and other causes were offered.

He shared a technique for curing even the most check-prone of wood. Madrona for instance. If I understood

correctly, the idea is to place a chunk of the wood on a non-wicking pedestal inside a plastic bag. Leave plenty of air in the bag, but close it. Check back regularly to vent the air and drain off any water that accumulates in the bottom of the bag. If somebody else at the meeting has clarification or correction for this description - let me know - and I'll publish it in next month's newsletter because the ability to cure finicky wood could be useful to a lot of us.

John's presentation ended with a wide ranging discussion of wood varieties and qualities.



Wayne took the stage with his personal zoo of "Antler Anomalies". There were 90° bends, signs of repeated impacts during growth, possible genetic abnormalities - all presenting challenges and opportunities for wild knife handles...

Wayne discussed pointers about working antlers, including using RIT die along with a vinegar soak (for several hours) to impart a desired color.

There was discussion of spotting a wrought or forged anvil by the square holes below the waist and in the bottom. Hay-Budden and Peter Wright anvils were praised. Beyond getting an anvil that has the weight and shapes you want, the key test is how well a hammer – or ball bearing – bounces off the face. If you drop a good sized ball bearing on the face and it bounces back to your hand – that's a good anvil! That recoil will save lots of work over the years.

Note from the newsletter editor: The classic height for an anvil is the height of your knuckles when you stand relaxed with your fingers curled. I've noticed that I forge hunched over at this height – not the best for my back. I've see notes on bladesmithing forums advocating a slightly higher anvil – and I cut myself a new base out of an oak snag on the property and am trying this slightly higher anvil. So far, I like it.

Eric Ochs brought his handle material/treatment test board to show-and-tell at the meeting. The short answer seems to be “Micarta and G10: Good”. Personally, I just love wood handles – but only Desert Ironwood and Ash stabilized by K & G held up reasonably through Eric's weather endurance test. You can see the details at Eric's web site: http://www.ochssherworx.com/index_files/Page513.htm

Eric also brought three blades with him... a unique copper handled hunter:



... a **very** nice spear point:



... and a hunter that I really love:

As I mentioned, Keith and I participated in the Woodcraft store's Fall sale/demo event. We set up a couple of tables on the covered walk in front of the store along with several lathe displays where folks were turning bowls, pens, etc. and letting others try their hand at turning.

I displayed a partially built knife, a bent ABS test blade, a finished Bowie, and a “Jaguar” blade that I was working on and books, drawings, newsletters. Keith set up a couple of belt grinders – got a kit knife from the store and set to work on that.



And that's all the news that's fit to print: See you Thursday!

