

Splinters

Tennessee Valley Woodworkers

Vol. 13/ Issue 3

March 1999

Editor: Tom Gillard

Meeting Notice:

The next meeting of the TN Valley Woodworkers
Will be held, March 16, 1999 at 7:00 p.m. in the
Duck River Electric Building, Dechard, TN
All interested woodworkers are invited!

Secretary notes:

February 16, 1999

Meeting called to order by president Loyd Ackerman. Dick Westwick and Don Waggoner were introduced as welcomed guests.

Announcements - Dues are due. Members who need help with skills are asked to refer to the list and contact the person listed for that skill. Tom Cowan's workshop is on schedule. Bob Reese is going to have a workshop on sharpening, the date will be announced later. The executive committee met January 26th to discuss the exhibit planned for the first quarter of 2000. A club committee will be formed at a later date. Club members are encouraged to submit names for the exhibit.

Old business - Doyle McConnell presented the club with two new 2 x 5' banners in yellow and black. They will be available for all club functions.

New business - Tom Church reported that the Belvidere Fire Department is having a tractor pull on June 5, 1999. Our club has been invited to participate. Tom will have a report in March.

Show and Tell -

Tom Cowan - two collection plates, cherry and walnut, and a burl bowl.

Bob Leonard - a jewelry box cut on a bandsaw using walnut, sugar maple, holly and boxwood. Bob

indicated that he could use some help in tuning his bandsaw.

Steve Graham - a relief carving on a large cherry board. Steve promised to bring the finished piece to a later meeting.

Henry Davis - Maple suggestion box for a church.

Billy May - an Indian head carving that he commissioned two years ago.

Jim Van Cleave - chisel handles, expansion bits and two of the drawers made in his three mini workshops.

John Sargent - a sharpening jig made from plans printed in SPLINTERS.

After a short break Bob Reese presented an informative program on the characteristics of steel and its uses in woodworking.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 PM.

Respectfully submitted, John Green, Secretary.

NOTE: There were three anonymous donors from the club who paid for the banners. We would like to thank them very much for this gift!

Bob always has wonderful handouts to use for his programs. Thanks Bob.



Here Bob demonstrates how to look at the sparks given off by a piece of metal on a grinding wheel.

BEECH

Beautiful, bountiful, bendable...and barely known.

There's a plentiful, cabinet-quality hardwood—pretty as yellow birch, strong as hard maple, and pliable as ash. But hardly anyone uses it! American beech grows over nearly half the nation, yet it seems you only hear about it from the brewery that touts “beach-wood aged” beer. (Beech, as it turns out, imparts no taste of its own to the brew.)

Long ago, however, English craftsmen turned a European variety of beech to make legs for Windsor chairs. Even the ancient Greeks and Romans worked beech into tables, chairs, and chests.

In this country, beech lags behind other woods in popularity because it takes careful handling during seasoning to avoid checking, warping, shrinking, and discoloration. To avoid the processing expense, beech logs are sold for paper pulp or made into clothespins. Some beech is used in the furniture industry for framing and bentwood parts. In the cabinet shop, it's made into molding.

Wood Identification

You'll find beech in every hemisphere, yet only one species grows in the U.S., *Fagus grandifolia*. Loosely translated, *fagus* means “to eat,” referring to its edible nuts, while *grandifolia* means “large-

leaved.”

Beech trees often grow in pure stands in lower elevations from Maine south to northern Florida and west to Wisconsin and Texas. In prime conditions, trees may tower to 120' and approach 4' in diameter. A slow grower, beech is a survivor, living up to 300 to 400 years. You can spot beech by its smooth, shinlike, silver-gray bark, here and there disfigured by dark blotches and scars.

Beech wood resembles yellow birch, but with a tint of red in the darker brown heartwood and a hint of pink in the lighter sapwood. The grain is fine, with telltale, tiny pores. Count on beech to be hard, strong, and heavy—it weighs about 45 lbs. Per cubic foot dry.

Working properties

Think of beech as working like hard maple and bending like ash. It doesn't yield easily to hand tools, but it machines well. Screws and nails hold tight in beech's close grain. Gluing presents no problems, either. The wood readily takes stain and sands to a smooth finish. Beech does have a peculiarity, however. Because of the heartwood and sapwood's markedly different expansion and contraction rates, you wouldn't mix the two in the same project. If you did, you could end up with separated joints or uneven surfaces in the finished piece.

Uses in woodworking

Beech represents one of a handful of woods that could be classified as “all-purpose” for interior use. It fills the bill for frame construction as well as finished surfaces, and it bends when steamed. Made into drawers, beech exhibits the unique property of becoming slicker as it rubs against other wood members. In woodturning, beech excels in objects with delicate stems, such as goblets. For toys, it resists splintering and chipping, and has no toxic properties (keep that quality in mind for bowls and cutting boards, too). Beech also resists wear when wet.

Cost and availability

Although beech may be abundant in the forest, you won't find it everywhere at retail, especially far from its source. The large suppliers that carry beech charge less for it than the more popular hard maple or yellow birch. Beech boards may be as wide as 12" and range up to 16' long. While beech sometimes becomes veneer, due to lack of demand you'll seldom find it used as the face on hardwood plywood.