

Volume 12, Issue 8 August 2005

# *THE CHARLOTTE SAWDUST*

The Official Journal of

**The Charlotte Woodworker's Association**

www.charlottewoodworkers.org

## **Small Talk**

**Our regular meeting place has changed to the CHARLOTTE ART LEAGUE The address is:**

Charlotte Art League  
1517 Camden Road  
Charlotte, NC 28203  
Phone: 704.376.2787  
cal@charlotteartleague.org  
<http://www.charlotteartleague.org/>

Parking is available beside the CAL building and on the surrounding streets. I do have (2) maps to attach which were provided by a new member Mike Smith, thanks Mike!

As most of you know our President Bruce Bradford has resigned, we all owe a tremendous thanks to Kyle Edwards and Jaye Peterman for picking up the slack! I'm not certain of the by-laws, but I know we would all be glad to have someone volunteer to fill in for Bruce for the next few months. Also please check your schedules and we will certainly need to elect a new president for next year. I believe we hold nominations in October and elections in November. Please also think ahead to make items for the sale at the church to raise money for gifts for underprivileged children, Dwight Hartsell has all the details.

Sincerely,

Phil Ashley

Phillipjashley@aol.com

(704) 841-2001 x338 days

(704) 548-2851 evenings

## **August Program**

We will have a presentation by Gil Milsaps on Windsor Chairs.

## Meeting Time

Meetings of the Charlotte Woodworker's Association are held the third Monday of each month, except for December **Each month we will meet at the CHARLOTTE ART LEAGUE** The address is:

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1517 Camden Road  
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cal@charlotteartleague.org  
<http://www.charlotteartleague.org/>

Following a social and refreshment time that starts at 5:30pm, our meetings start at 6:00pm. Get to the meeting early and get to know your fellow woodworking enthusiasts.

## \$\$\$ Save Money at the Woodworking Shop \$\$\$

As a member of the Charlotte Woodworkers Association you can save 10% off all your purchases from The Woodworking Shop, excluding wood and power tools. Thanks to our hosts at the Woodworking Shop for allowing us to have our monthly meetings and extending 10% off to CWA members.

## Write an article for Sawdust (thanks for all the help from those that have)

Please consider writing an article for The Sawdust, this is your newsletter what do you want from it? What do you want to share with your fellow woodworkers? Everyone likes to share, share your successes, failures, mistakes, have fun with it and share with others at the same time! Contact Phil Ashley @  
ecretary@charlottewoodworkers.org or call (704) 841-2001 x 338 days or (704) 548-2851 evenings.

## CWA Mentor Program

The following members have offered their help to anyone interested in learning skills or new techniques in their area of interest. Contact each person to arrange times to get together if interested.

### Name Area of Interest Phone Email

Wayne Cooper \*\*\* 704.409.1417 cooper@arconmfg.com

Bill Golden Shopsmith & Accessories 704.525.9691 popstoishop@juno.com

Dwight Hartsell Woodturning 704.598.6029 woodwight@aol.com

Jeff Jacobs any woodworking 704.309.1263 jacobj@meckco.com

Wayne Manahan Sharpening 704.786.0768 wmanahan@vnet.net

Gil Milsaps Windsor chairs 704.875.0758 gad32about@aol.com

Alvin Tench any woodworking 704.824.7717 alvintench@netzero.com

\*\*\* Wayne Cooper has a fairly complete shop and would actually like an experienced woodworker to use it and teach him how to use it properly in exchange for use of the shop. If you are interested in helping Mr. Cooper please contact him directly to make appropriate arrangements.

## **Classified Section**

**\$\$ For Sale \$\$**

**Please email [cwasecretary@aol.com](mailto:cwasecretary@aol.com) or call 704-519-5662 with any items you wish to buy or sell.**

### **H & S Lumber**

Members receive Contractor Pricing  
4115 Monroe Road  
Charlotte, NC 28205  
704.333.3130 (sponsor)

### **Woodcraft**

Mr. David Boyuka  
1725 Windsor Square Drive  
Matthews, NC 28105  
704.847.8300 (contributing)

### **Harbor Freight USA**

Mr. Martin Treadwell, Manager  
3852 E. Independence Blvd.  
Charlotte, NC 28205  
704.569.0182 (contributor)

### **The Woodworking Shop of Charlotte**

Mr. David Owens, Manager  
116M Freeland Lane  
Charlotte, NC 28217  
704.521.8886 (contributing/sponsor – except  
power tools and wood)

Show your CWA membership card at any of the listed places and receive benefits (except for Woodcraft and Harbor Freight USA, which are not able to provide sponsorship in the form of discounts).

## **The History of the American Windsor Chair Revolution in the New World**

Reprinted from [www.gummelchairworks.com](http://www.gummelchairworks.com)

Soon after Windsor chairs first appeared in King George's England almost 300 years ago, the design made its way to the Colonies in the New World. Despite its royal English origins, the chair reached its greatest popularity in America. American Windsor Chairs even to this day remain one of the most widely copied styles of seating in America. After arriving in the New World, Colonial chair makers quickly discarded the English Windsor motif just as politicians in the Colonies revolted against King George's tyranny. The chair quickly took on new forms and became quintessentially American: it was a democratic chair at home in the kitchen or the living room, a farmhouse or a courthouse or even out on the lawn. It was lightweight, comfortable, relatively inexpensive and, when compared to furniture of that period, quick to make.

Looking back through American history, Windsor chairs can be seen in many notable places as documented through paintings.

As a matter of fact, George Washington himself fancied Windsor chairs - with a recorded 27 Windsor chairs at his Mount Vernon home. Thomas Jefferson is said to have written a draft of the Declaration of Independence while seated in a Windsor. When the Declaration was signed in Philadelphia's Independence Hall on July 4, 1776, the assembly sat in Windsors. Washington's officers sat in Windsor chairs at Fraunces Tavern in New York City to listen to his farewell speech. In more recent history, Henry Francis du Pont, the founder of Winterthur Museum in Delaware, had 250 Windsor chairs in his collection.

### **FREEDOM OF IMAGINATION IN AMERICA YIELDS DESIGN EXCELLENCE**

In the 70 years after the chair's introduction to the Colonies around 1730, several important stylistic changes exploded old perceptions of the Windsor. These designs reflected the imagination of the American craftsman, as well as the freedom and opportunity that existed in the Colonies.

English Windsor's had been characterized by a Prince of Wales pierced backslat and nearly vertical legs, both of which were changed immediately by American chairmakers. English and American Windsors have shared the one quality that defines the form: a thick seat acting as a foundation, with the back spindles stuck into the top of the seat and legs plugged into the socketed underside. But a combination of factors unique to America helped the Windsor chair improve and flourish in the Colonies.

### **ECONOMIC SYSTEM WITHOUT AUTHORITARIANISM CONTROL "FREE ENTERPRISE"**

In England, each chairmaker was required to belong to a guild, which dictated where he could make chairs, what kind and how much he could charge for them. The guild controlled or neutralized competition and thus stifled the initiative and innovation of English craftsmen. Therefore yielding a substandard product with little to no appeal as everybody had the same thing.

In America there were few guilds, so chairmakers were unhampered by restrictive laws. Instead, they were stimulated by an active exchange of design ideas and craft techniques with other immigrant craftsmen. Each chairmaker was allowed to use his own imagination and develop his own

originality. The market for native furniture was growing at a frenzied pace, and the Windsor form was one well suited to satisfy that demand. As a matter of fact, Windsor's were one of the first "production" type businesses in the new world. These brave new chairmakers developed a team and camaraderie with fellow wheelwrights and other wood turners, sharing the business and creating new business and capitalism for others. As a result, the majority of chairmakers subcontracted their turned chair parts out to their fellow wood turners.

The independence of American chairmakers led to a wealth of Windsor designs with regional differences. These variations were sometimes idiosyncratic, such as an exaggerated splay of the legs or a peculiar turning pattern. Comb-back chairs were made mostly in Philadelphia; continuous-arm chairs were a New York innovation. Rhode Island Windsor's had a short taper at the end of the leg. Connecticut chairs had no "rain gutter", the carved decorative groove that follows the back rim of the seat. Sometimes the use of a particular wood identified the chair with an area. For example, you could fairly safely bet that any Windsor with a poplar seat came from Pennsylvania.

## **WINDSORS WERE IN THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME**

The population of the Colonies was doubling every 20 years, creating an enormous demand for inexpensive and quickly made furniture. The Windsor form was well suited to satisfy this urgent need. Because Windsor construction called for as much wood turning talent as chairmaking ability, wheelwrights and other wood turners joined traditional American Windsor chairmakers in churning them out. The backsplat and the painstakingly carved cabriole leg found on some English chairs were discarded by American Windsor chairmakers because they slowed production. This stylistic revolution opened the door to other, more significant innovations that would have never been made possible was it not for their new found freedom.

The fact that the Colonial population was spread mostly along the eastern seaboard helped distribute American Windsor's—and the design variations they exhibited. As American merchant ships from the south unloaded their cargoes of cotton, sugar or mahogany at northern seaports, captains filled their empty holds with Windsors for profitable return trips, stopping at American and Caribbean

ports. In fact it has been recorded that between 1797 and 1800, Philadelphia shipped an amazing 10,000 Windsor chairs to Havana.

The lush, tree-covered Colonial countryside also helped American Windsors thrive. English Windsor makers used only woods available to them: seats usually were made of elm, turned parts were made of beech, and bent arms were made of ash and yew. American woods were superior for making Windsor chairs because of their great tensile strength and high modulus of elasticity. Easily carved poplar and soft pine were used for seats; fresh-cut oak, chestnut and hickory, which were flexible and could be turned or steam bent while still green, were used for spindles and bent parts. Birch and maple, tight-grained and dense, were commonly used for the arm posts and the undercarriage turnings, producing stretchers and legs with crisp details.

#### **AMERICAN WINDSOR CHAIRMAKERS SETTING THE COURSE FOR WINDSOR INNOVATION THAT CONTINUES TO THIS TODAY**

American chairmakers rarely passed up the opportunity to embellish their creations; for example, the chair's handholds often were carved into decorative knuckles. The turnings were also a clear departure from English patterns, which were streamlined with little modulation. Perhaps one of the most noted is the American comb-back pattern. They were highly energetic, adding visual interest to an already exciting Windsor form. Hundreds of different types of Windsors have been made in America in the last 275 + years, but there are several uniquely American Windsors that set the course for Windsor innovation that still continues to this day.

**THE PHILADELPHIA COMB-BACK** is one of the most notable. The Philadelphia comb-back, dates to about 1740. With its upward soaring spindles and curved arms, the Philadelphia comb-back commands attention.



The chair also had a large D-shaped seat; English chairs had more or less square seats with the rear corners cut off and rounded, producing a static and visually anchored Windsor. With less depth in the Philadelphia seat, all the elements were brought closer to the front, creating the illusion that the chair was moving to wrap itself around the person about to sit in it.

The finely turned arm posts and large handholds carved with decorative knuckles were also new to the Windsor form. While English chairmakers bent and carved the arm posts, Colonial chairmakers turned theirs on a lathe, in keeping with the rings and reels found on the chair's legs and stretchers. This repetition created a synergy of the design elements and united the top half of the chair with the undercarriage.

## **INNOVATION AND ADAPTATION FITTING IN WITH THE NEW WORLD**

Chairmakers created the writing-arm Windsor in about 1770. Chairmakers started with oversized chairs, and then added a large paddle-shaped writing surface on the right side. They attached the paddle in one of three ways: with the writing surface substituted for the regular arm; with the paddle attached over the original arm; or with the chair and arm designed and constructed as a writing-arm chair from inception. They also frequently added small drawers beneath the paddle and the seat.

In this design Windsor chairmakers created the largest and perhaps the most useful Windsor of them all. With commerce and scholarship in their infancy in the new land, many 18th-century businessmen and writers couldn't afford full desks but still needed a place to work. The writing-arm Windsor was the solution. Construction of the chair was particularly difficult because it not only had to be a useful piece of furniture but also had to succeed as a visually and structurally balanced design.

## **THE DRAMATIC MOVEMENT OF WINDSOR DESIGN**

**CONTINUOUS-ARM CHAIR.** First built in New York around 1775.



The continuous-arm Windsor chair was perhaps the most aesthetically pleasing of all Windsor's. The back of this remarkably complex chair - made from a single piece of wood - was steam-bent in two directions, producing a graceful sweeping compound curve that served as both the backrest and the armrests. This sculptural innovation created both drama and movement. The continuous-arm Windsor, with its sinuous curve, deeply carved shield-shaped seat, shapely turnings and canted legs, appeared ready to spring to life. This bold new form pushed Windsor chairmaking to aesthetic and technical heights with its beauty, strength, comfort and grace, it gave the New York chairmakers the vehicle to surpass their Philadelphia counterparts for the first time.

### **UNIFIED DESIGN BY MILK PAINT**

The English Chairmakers painted their Windsors because the chairs were often used in their gardens. The painted finish persisted in America, even after the English switched to stain and varnish.



American chairmakers believed that painting a Windsor unified its design and eliminated the distraction of the different kinds of wood, as well as the grain—thus allowing for a better appreciation of the chair's details. Most chairs made up to and around 1780 were originally painted green. During the fourth quarter of the eighteenth century to mid nineteenth century chairmakers began to branch out into new colors. During this time period it was the trend to paint them red. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the chairs were commonly painted black. As the paint has been built up on these antique Windsors the paint cracks giving an "alligator skin" like appearance. As this happens the various colors are seen through the surface.

Later, American chairmakers began to paint their chairs in brighter colors—black, red, straw, mustard and gold leaf—and decorated them with pinstripes, pastoral scenes, cornucopia and imitation rosewood grain. Many of these motifs were stenciled onto the chair and embellished with bronze powders, bright hand-painted accents and gilt decoration.

Rest assured that although they claim royal lineage, Windsor chairs are remarkably democratic in their appeal. No matter where you go, there they are, socializing without a thought for pedigree, looking as comfortable in a kitchen as in a period drawing room. Visit the rest of our site to learn more about our authentic reproduction, bench-made American Windsor chairs. We use the same methods of construction as the old world master Windsor chairmakers.

## 2005 CWA Officers

President	Open
Vice President	Kyle Edwards <a href="mailto:vp@charlottewoodworkers.org">vp@charlottewoodworkers.org</a>
Treasurer	Jaye Peterman <a href="mailto:treasurer@charlottewoodworkers.org">treasurer@charlottewoodworkers.org</a>
Secretary	Phil Ashley <a href="mailto:secretary@charlottewoodworkers.org">secretary@charlottewoodworkers.org</a>

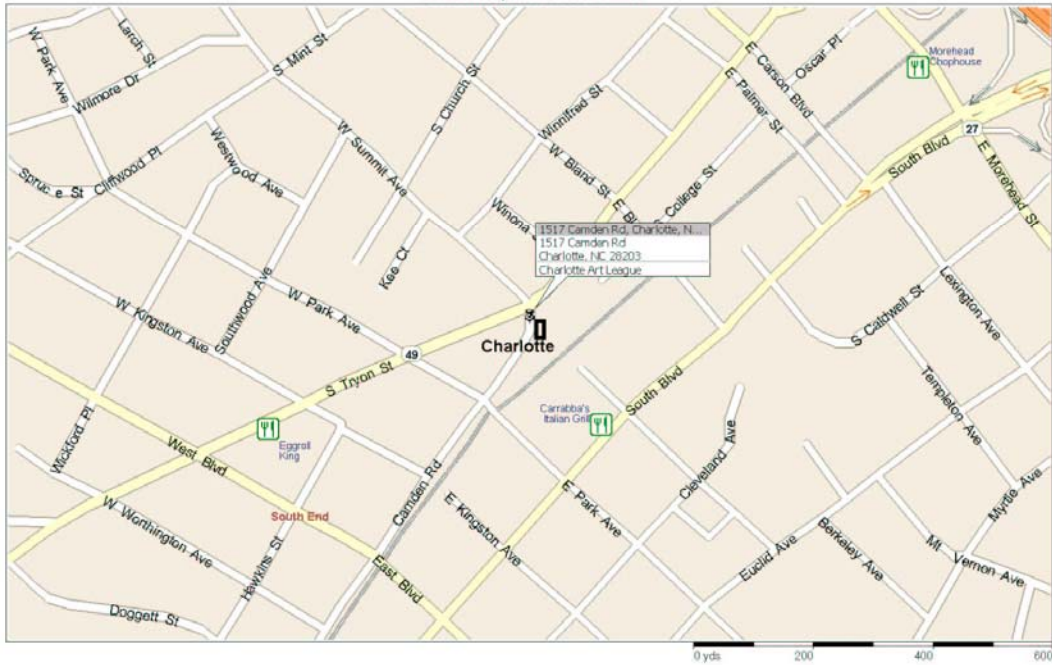
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Next Meeting:  
August 15, 2005  
At the Charlotte Art League

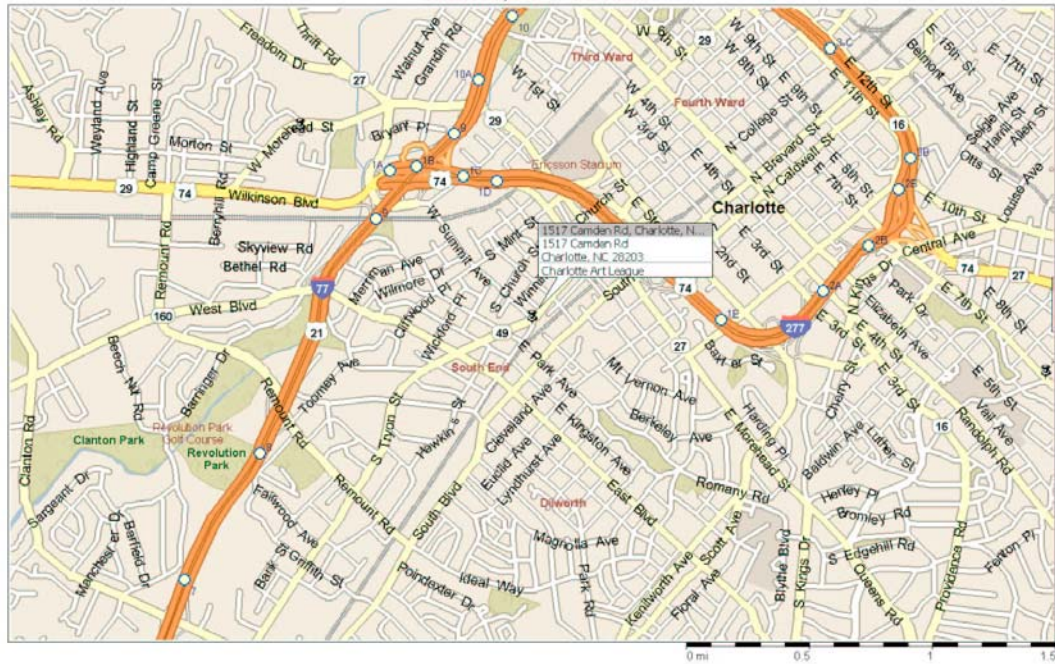
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### Charlotte, North Carolina



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