

[Frank Thomas Arthur]

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Frank Thomas Arthur (Woodcarver)

Tryon, North Carolina

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Frank Arthur was hard at work on a fine piece of carving when I went to his well-equipped shop in the washburn building Washburn Building , which overlooks the town park, and affords a view of the distant mountains. There were beautiful pieces of carving, finished work and many others in an incomplete stage about the shop. Patterns hung from the walls, and a neat array of tools were conveniently arranged over his work bench. Each piece of Frank's work was well executed to the most minute detail, and bore the marks of an artist. He laid down his tool and welcomed me with a smile. "Want the story of my life? Why, it's just started, like most of this work; but I'll gladly tell you all I can.

"Ever since I can remember, I have been carving away at something. I always seemed to have a turn for expression that way, just as others sing, or play some instrument. I make my living carving, but at the same time give expression to my thoughts in my work.

"Mother says I inherited the gift from grandfather Hure, who came from Selkirk, Scotland to Manatoba, Canada in the early eighties, and settled there on a large farm. Grandfather was always whittling, she said; never sat down to rest that he didn't draw from his 2 pocket a knife with smooth keen blade and a piece of wood. He fashioned some queer looking objects, but he carved purely for the love of carving. Perhaps, if he had been as fortunate

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as I have, that is, in the training for this work I've been given; Grandfather Hure might have turned out to be a skilled artisan. If he has handed this gift down to me I am grateful; I haven't made much of a success financially in my work, but I feel some of it has been outstanding and I am working toward a name in the future. There isn't much to tell about my life, a great deal, any way, of just what happens to a man is chance; some find the easy road others, like myself, just miss the chance they might have had for fame and success. I married too soon, and my first marriage didn't turn out so well; except for the two fine boys. They are now nine and twelve.

"I'm married again to a splendid woman, who is wonderful to my sons. They both love her and she is doing a real mother's part by them.

"When I was two years old, my family came to Biltmore, North Carolina , to make their home. Father had secured a position as superintendent of farms on a large estate near Asheville, North Carolina. I can't remember going there, or Hot Springs, North Carolina, where I was born; funny how you can't go back to your childhood sometimes. About my earliest recollection is of watching the school children who were sufficiently well up in their studies to be going there, work at arts and crafts in a school owned by a wealthy northerner and run by the kindly women whose mission was to develop talent in the youth of Western North Carolina. I worked in the arts and crafts school until 1917 at which time I volunteered and was assigned to the American Field service in the French army, for ambulance duty, later being transferred to the American Army. I served two years before being invalided back to America; but, like most of the fellows who were in the thick of it, I don't like to talk about those two years. They were full of havoc and suffering, and no matter how well planned things were- war is war. There wasn't much rest or comfort for us ambulance drivers, we certainly could never be sure of anything. Every man tried to do his duty and trust his luck would hold. Well, you see mine did. When I see the wrecks of once strong men, victims of war, I feel I have truly been fortunate.

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“After I got back to the states, and had grown 4 strong again, I started out looking for work. Again I was lucky, you know what the fellows went through looking for a job after being discharged. I found my first one with the American Aluminum Company in New York and stayed with them until father wrote me I could get my old job back with the arts and crafts school in Biltmore, North Carolina. Well, you know it didn't take me long to go back to the work I loved. I stayed with the school, as a junior instructor until the death of the owner. Then the industry was sold, and a drastic change in mode of operation left the wood carver out. I secured a position with the Sonora Phonograph Company in Saganaw, Michigan, designing and carving cabinets and worked for that company until the Tryon Toy Makers Company was organized by the same people who had trained me at the school in Biltmore. I came here to work for them as head of the woodcarving department—that was in 1928. We turned out some beautiful work too, one of the finest was the carved tower door for Mr. Fred Sealey's castle on Sunset Mountain. This was a massive oak door with a design in carving , worked out from old wood cuts we found in an old fifteenth century Bible, representing the months and years. Another fine piece of carving is the fire board in the salon of Margaret Culkin Bannings' home here in Tryon. There are many 5 others equally noteworthy. Our boys all did good work, we were proud of the pieces we turned out; combining our efforts to make each as fine or finer than the last.

“There's a fascination about seeing your work sort of come to life under your tool, and a wonderful feeling when it is completed. One of my biggest orders was for the hand carving in Calvary Episcopal Church, at Fletcher, North Carolina, called the Westminster of the South. This work consisted of alter, pulpit and the hand carved eagle on the lectarn. The next order of importance was the pieces done in the Hall of Music at the Asheville School for boys, a memorial hall dedicated to the memory of Howard Bennent, its founder. During the summer, when work at my shop was slack, I taught a class of girls at Camp Modamin near here.

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"I have been in this studio since I lost my little home in which I had just completed a fine studio before depression. I have gone through some pretty tough days, since 1929, but I'm going to come out all right. I'm beginning to get some nice orders again, and when I have time I carve the trophies for the Tryon Riding and Hunt Club, and work for the Tryon Toy Makers too. I'm working all the time to improve my designs. It 6 was a nice surprise to be invited to be listed in *Who's Who in American Artists*. I was might mighty proud of that recognition, but the thing I want to accomplish more than any other, is to be able to work ou out some plan by which a course in woodcarving could be included in the public school course throughout the state. I would like to give training to gifted boys, and from this material select the future instructors for that department. Of course, being an artisan, I feel that carving would be a worth-while course; so much talent could be found and developed in the schools.

"Oh well, it's nice to have a hobby, that's mine. Someday, perhaps, I may succeed in making my plans turn out for that work, until then I presume I'll be right here plugging away."