



March 2009

# The Wood Spinner

Central Virginia Woodturners

[www.centralvawoodturners.org](http://www.centralvawoodturners.org)

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## President's Corner

1 The big event of March was the Willie Simmons demo. Several of the officers went over Friday to set up, and we finally had a good video setup that gave a good image on our 8' screen. This was greatly helped by the foam light blockers Starke customized for the 6 big windows. The weather was chilly but not icy, and the room was plenty warm for the Saturday demo. Those who made it were treated to an excellent presentation of spindle turning basics from the invaluable perspective of production work, which leads to techniques and solutions that really work. Willie was quite prepared with plenty of sample handouts, an oversized wood skew and gouge to illustrate what he was doing, and a fine stock of anecdotes and jokes. The time flew by, and he was swamped with questioners during every break. Tom Evans had the coffee, morning treats, and lunch under good control.

Unfortunately, the remote recording mike was never plugged in. It was an enormous disappointment to discover our video had no sound, for the demo was rich in so many ways and would have been a great asset to our library. John and I will be coming up with a checklist for the future, as well as trying to work out a way to have a sound monitor as well as a video monitor. Willie's demo was so good that we will simply have to have him back sometime in the future for all those who couldn't make it last time.

We had two new members join us, bringing our paid membership up to something like 72. Welcome, George Marrah from Harrisonburg and Phil Schoner from Lexington.

Our upcoming meeting will be a multi-station event. There will be four main stations as it were, but with several people attending to two of the subjects: Carving with Dave Potter, Jim Oates, Joan Baumgardner; Turning Pens with Bryce Connelly and Betty Gruber; Turning Spheres with Dennis Hippen, and Sharpening with Starke Smith. We'll have to work out the logistics when we get there!

I hope most of you got to see Bert Smith's displays at either The Waynesboro Heritage Shop or at The Virginia Shop at the Barracks Road Shopping Center in Charlottesville. His work sure looks good and is a tribute to our profession. Well done, Bert.

The AAW symposium is coming up in Albuquerque, New Mexico, June 26-29. I suspect most of you have seen the details in the American Woodturner magazine, but you can also get details at <http://www.woodturner.org/sym/sym2009/>.

Closer to home we have the North Carolina Symposium October 23-25, featuring a number of fine demonstrators from near and far, and up to 20 vendors. Check out <http://www.northcarolinawoodturning.com/> Let's talk it up at future meetings and see if any want to share rides.

See you April 21, Fred



## Willie Simmons Spindle Turning

Willie Simmons was our featured guest demonstrator on March 14, 2009. We had about 30 attendees, and those who weren't there missed a great show. Willie covered the basics of spindle turning using the skew and the gouge, but that hardly describes how effectively he illustrated the dynamics of tool on spinning wood that we all deal with. He spoke from the perspective of production turning, where one makes one shape over and over and thus comes to find the most effective and dependable methods of achieving that necessary result. Throughout it all he amused us with a string of stories and jokes that were most entertaining.

Willie got into turning as a kid when his father tossed a job at him to turn some parts for a stool, and then proceeded to give him no coaching whatsoever. He had to teach himself pretty much everything on the fly.



He began with a most effective illustration. A finished turned sample was painted black, about one-third of one side

(simulating a damaged part of the original) was cut off and a plain block was glued on, and then that bi-colored combination was chucked up for us.



When the lathe was running you could see both the profile being turned to as well as the cuts being made approaching the finished shape. It was most dramatic.

Willie had a massively oversized wooden gouge and a skew maybe 6" wide to illustrate the fine details of making cuts. Then he'd proceed to make the same cut on the spinning blank.



Although he uses the skew a good bit, he uses an inch and a half roughing gouge round off the corners, rotating the leading edge of the gouge with fluid movements left to right according to direction of cut, and always taking light cuts.

The skew would then smooth out the final pass. Using light cuts at 1200-1600 rpm speed on his deOneWay lathe at home he is able to go half a day or more between sharpening. He uses a 6" diamond hone to dress up his edges.



Here he is making those light cuts with the skew, leading with the blunt angle (heel) side.



He does use the pointed (toe) end at times, to initiate those defining lines or the notches between beads, and maybe to make the final shearing cut across the end grain, but he highlighted the necessity to stay "one minute past or before midnight" with the trailing edge (depending on whether cutting on the left or right side) to avoid that deadly catch.

## Willie Simmons Spindle Turning

cont.



Willie next illustrated the Bedan tool. This 3/8" flat topped cutter has tapered sides, so that the bottom is narrower than the top. It was highly effective as certain cuts, such as the rounding over of beads in this photo.



A spindle gouge with a steep fingernail grind can also be used to form beads or round over ends of knobs.

He next turned a few wine stopper handles, telling us how the simple shapes were the ones that kept on selling, no matter how much he experimented with more complex shapes. His wife finally pointed this out to him at a show and he relaxed from the pressure to come up with new shapes.



His simple shapes were most pleasing.

Craft Supplies, Packard, and others sell corks with 3/4" OD and 3/8" ID. Titebond II is used to glue the dowel into the wood handle for turning as well as gluing to the cork. He can turn 100 of these in a day, and he sells them as leaders at a craft show. More expensive metal wine stoppers with rubber seals (shown above) are preferred by some customers. Willie noted that red wine and vinegar will pit non-stainless stoppers.

Next Willie moved on to the peppermills. He started with a pepper/coffee grinder mechanism available from Penn State. A 1" hole is drilled through the wood base, the ends are trued, and a roughing gouge forms the initial profile that is finalized with a Sorby Spindle-master Gouge. The grinder is attached with screws onto the top of the turned base. Other than the extremely tight angle for the 4 screws, these are relatively easy to make and sell at a mid-range price.

Here are four samples of the internal mechanism pepper grinder that he demonstrated. Once again, he now tends to the simple shapes of the center two.



Turning these began with parting off the top third for the top and involved multiple mountings to achieve four different diameter drillings. The demo was slightly slowed by the lack of a key for the manual chuck he had along. His keyless chuck of choice would not fit our Jet. But he persevered and pulled it off fine. Using a careful final cut he is able to reduce the sanding necessary. Willie said sanding is the main reason he does not do bowls.

The mills are finished with General Finishes Seal\_A\_Cell. These 8" tall pepper mills take longer and cost a little more.

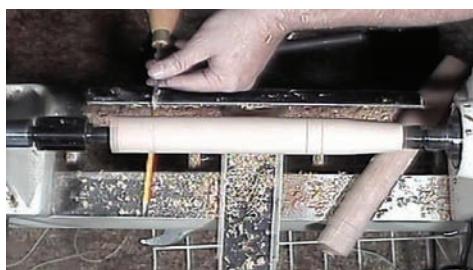
For much of his turning he uses a 1/4" four spur drive center. This allows him to safely turn those bottle stoppers, and also to mount and dismount stool spindles on the fly, never turning the lathe off. This was most impressive, but for obvious safety reasons it is definitely not recommended to novice turners.

## Willie Simmons Spindle Turning

cont.



Willie's final subject was the stool. He brought along his first ever stool and told us how bad it was. He then described how after repairing stool after stool and chair after chair he finally realized he'd made every part of the thing, so why not make one from scratch himself?



When turning the posts he makes pairs of lightly scribed lines with the skew spaced 3/4" apart. These are done by eye on the first leg and then copied to the following of the set. The lines will locate the centers of the rung holes, and are spaced so that the second rung tenon will overlap and cut into the one above or below it, locking them together.

It was a marvel how fast he could produce a rung. An open end wrench made a fine gauging tool. It is critical in this process that the rungs be bone dry. After initial turning the rungs are dried in a small oven, and then the tenons are final turned.



Working on the outboard be of the lathe, Willie assembled a sample stool and then showed how he weaves the seat, first with a fiber rush (a twisted kraft paper twine) and then with flat reed. He gave tips on what to look out for and where to buy supplies, and started the process of weaving both types.



This part looked tedious to me, but Willie must be able to move right along, for he sells the finished stools at very rea-

sonable prices. A basic stapler is all he needs to join one strip onto the next piece, for in the end the staples are pulled out and the set in the strips once they dry are enough to hold them in place. The reed he was using was dry and difficult to work with, but he said when moistened they bent and pulled much more easily. Cardboard strips are slipped in between the top and the bottom courses towards the end of the weaving to help prevent sagging over time.

Willie suggested the H. H. Perkins as a good resource for weaving supplies. See <http://hhperkins.com>. There are several guide books on their site, but Willie indicated no book can really tell you everything.

Through this whole multi-part demonstration Willie kept up a most informative and entertaining description of what he was doing and why. It is a crying shame our sound was not plugged in for the recording, for we got a fine video feed and the image on the eight foot screen was most helpful for those in back, and made a fine copy for our DVD library. But so much is lost without the voice track. We will simply have to have him back sometime for those who missed him.

## Show and Tell

We had a modest yet still impressive Show and Tell for March. Here are a few images:



Elbert Dale's segmented turning from left-over yellow pine step treads. He put the stack in his 10 ton press with Titebond III for two days and got very tight gluelines. Also a natural edge cherry bowl.



Rattle and carved closed vessel by Jim Oates, two bowls by Mars Champaign.



Two boring tools by Kirk McCauley, with his latest clamping system for a 1/4" sq. bit.



Here is a close-up of the single set screw that locks the bit in place at any angle.



Several piece by Dennis Hippen



And some fine small pieces by Don Voas and Hal Green

## Show and Tell cont.



Here are some shots of Jim Higgins's latest epoxy composite creation. Notice that the lower shot is the view of the underside.



Ron Dearing's creations, including a highly figured maple urn and a cherry/walnut combination with quite the accent voids.

We return to the regular meeting date of third Tuesday on April 21. This will be a multi-station session, featuring carving with Dave Potter, Jim Oates, and Joan Baumgardener showing us how they do their work. Also featured will be pen-turning by Bryce Connelly and Betty Gruber. Dennis Hippen will have a lathe set up for turning spheres, and finally there will be a sharpening station set up to the side for those who want to touch up their edges.

## About Central Virginia Woodturners

**Central Virginia Woodturners** is a local chapter of the AAW with over 70 active members. Club meetings are held the third Tuesday of each month from 6:30 to 9:00 PM at the Crimora Community Center.

### Directions to the Center:

From Staunton and points north or south, from I-81 take the Rt. 612 Verona exit east, or from route 11 just north of Verona turn east onto Rte. 612 (at the Burger King). Stay on 612 for 10-12 miles. After crossing South River, the Crimora Community Center is on the left.

From Charlottesville and points east on I-64, take Exit 96 (Lyndhurst Exit) and go north on Delphine Street. After a mile or so you will cross 250 E. at the Hess Station and join 340 North. Go 6 miles north and turn left onto Rt. 612 at the BP Station. Go 1 mile and the center is on the right just after the RR tracks.

### Contact Information:

For information on attending CVW meetings or joining CVW, contact:  
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