

Master Horner PROFILES

This is the fifth in a series of articles on those members of the Honourable Company of Horners who have achieved the status of Master Horner. Currently there are nine members who have attained this status and each one has played an integral role in the Guild, whether it is in their demonstrated artisan skills, leadership abilities, or being instrumental in the growth and development of our organization.

Master Horners

John Proud | Roland Cadle | John Kiselica
Lee Larkin | Art DeCamp | Joe Becker
Willy Frankfort | Erv Tschanz | Ron Ehlert

In accordance with the Guild's Standing Rules, for anyone to become a Master Horner, an individual must "demonstrate a superlative level of ability in carving, heating and pressing, turning, engraving, and integrating woods and metals with cow horn by presenting three horn objects that demonstrate his or her ability to the Awards Committee for evaluation," plus give "an original written and oral presentation to the HCH at an annual meeting or to another accredited organization on some aspect of horn working or its history." Needless to say, this is a high standard that has been met by only a few members and each has played a vital role in making the HCH what it is today. ■

Art DeCamp Master Horner

When one looks at the group of Master Horners, your initial impression is that they are highly talented artisans, as well as being a group well above the norm in expertise and the knowledge of horn working.

But when you start looking at each one individually, you quickly realize that despite a high degree of talent, knowledge and skill, that there is a broad spectrum of personalities at play and this is one factor that makes our Guild so unique and special.

Art DeCamp is the most "quiet-loud" member of this elite group! That is meant in a very complimentary manner and perhaps an explanation is warranted, as it would indeed be quite unfortunate for Art's "loud" proponent to be unleashed on this "humble gatherer and writer of news events!"



Art has always been a primary mainstay in the Guild serving on various judging committees, the Awards Committee, and for the past three years has been our Treasurer. In addition, he has given numerous classes, demonstrations on horn working, and been the "go to guy" when a special expertise was needed for a project or for resolution of a problem. He is one who listens, remains emotionally detached, and when asked his opinion in an emotionally charged discussion, things have a tendency to become quite quiet, for when he speaks, his thoughts and words tend to have an impact and folks listen!



Born in Lafayette, Indiana, Art attended Purdue University and graduated with a degree in Industrial Management and a minor in Industrial Engineering. He worked for Owens-Corning and then its successor, Containment Solutions at several manufacturing plants. Needless to say he is well traveled and during his professional career lived in Indiana (twice), Texas, Tennessee, Florida and now Pennsylvania. The last 18 years was spent as a Plant Manager, first in Auburndale, FL and then in Mount Union, PA., retiring in May 2008, after 35 years. This explains why Art is so meticulous and whenever asked a question, Art always has time to discuss your problem and render a very thorough and knowledgeable response.

When asked about the origin of his interest in horn working he related the following story:

"My father collected antique guns and powder horns, so as far back as I can remember, there were rifles and powder horns in the house. The first powder horn I

remember was an engraved horn that my dad bought from a dealer named Miller Bedford back in about 1953. While Dad collected mainly percussion Colt and early military pistols, he did have a few Kentucky rifles over the years, and these were always what caught my eye. Horns must have been something that I was interested in at a pretty early age, as I have a very clear memory of taking a powder horn to school on the bus for "show & tell" when I was in the second grade back in 1958."

"When I was about 16 or 17, a friend of Dad's named Tom Dawson came by the house. He was a very accomplished builder of contemporary longrifles starting in the 1950's and his work is featured in Robert Weil's book on contemporary makers. During his visit, he had a near perfect replica of the Edward Marshall rifle and a fine replica Hawken that he had made. This event was the "spark" that smoldered for about twelve more years until I started trying to build my own rifles in late 1979."



"In 1980, following completion of that first CVA kit, I realized a fellow needed a powder horn to go with it, so I shaped out a "kit" horn, and then engraved it with the British seal and a map of the area where I grew up. I built mostly rifles during the 1980's, and only a few horns. In the mid 1980's, I found that people would actually PAY me for making a horn, especially an engraved one, or even a nice Karl Wilbur supplied kit horn. That really started me on making horns. Then I got interested in "how in the world do you make a screw tip horn", bought a small lathe, and started to try to teach myself how to make screw tips. After fumbling around with my attempts to learn for several years, it wasn't until I met Roland Cadle in



1994, that I really began to learn and progress in this endeavor."

"When I first met Roland at a gun show, he explained his thoughts and theories on how manufactured horns were produced. He also told me that he had made a personal decision to share his knowledge of how this was done with other interested parties, rather than keeping the knowledge to himself and using it to be able to exclusively make these screw tip type horns. Over the next several years, any time I was around

Roland, I tried to soak up anything he would share about making authentic horns. He was always very willing to train me, and were it not for his willingness to share his knowledge, I am certain I never would have progressed to the skill level of horn making that I have today. Because he lives fairly close by, we've spent many evenings together talking horns, and his help and encouragement has been instrumental in my learning process. I am truly grateful for his help and friendship."

When asked about his favorite style of powder horn and the type of horn work that interests him most, Art responded that screw tip horns of all types interest him most, but if he had to pick a specific style, it would be the York County. Working on the lathe to turn the various parts of a screw tip horn fascinates him as he really enjoys this type of work.

Over that last fifteen years Art has also become known for his engraved horns, especially very accurate replicas of the Tansel style engraved horns from Indiana. He has been fortunate in that he has been exposed to these for over 45 years and has made quite a few documentary copies of originals. In addition, he has taught several classes at Conner Prairie, near Indianapolis, Indiana, on how to make an engraved Tansel horns.

With this background, Art has also performed high quality restoration work on original powder horns and horn items, which is mainly the replacement of missing or broken screw tips, bands, threads, etc. This work provided him the opportunity to handle hundreds of original horns, that in turn gave him the experience necessary to not only make the necessary repairs, but to make his contemporary newly made horns as authentic as possible.

It was surprising to learn that Art's work shop is relatively small, about 15 ft. by 13ft., and is located in the corner of his basement. He has a drill press, band saw, bench grinder, 1" belt sander, 6" belt sander and three lathes. One is a 6" by 18" metal cutting lathe that is used primarily for turning the tips for horns. He can also replicate and cut special threads on this lathe and sometimes use it to cut metal tooling for the restoration work done on original horns. A second lathe is used for turning butt plugs and stoppers. The third lathe is set up for outboard turning only and has a speed control that allows it to turn very low speeds. This lathe is used for the turning of the actual powder horns.

In doing research for his horn work Art has viewed several antique horn collections, both private and public which include the collections at

the awareness of his work.

Needless to say, his horns have won many awards, the most notable being the first place ribbons on several occasions at Dixons' Gunmakers Fair, including "Best Decorated Horn" and "Most Historically Accurate Accoutrement"; and at the Honourable Company of Horners' annual competition with "Best Pennsylvania Style Horn" at the Bedford conference, and "Best Southern Style Horn" at the Old Salem conference in North Carolina.

Art's work has been featured in *Muzzle Blasts*, *Muzzleloader*, *Westsylvania*, and *Common Ground* magazines, and has been exhibited at the Western Pennsylvania Museum of History in Pittsburgh, PA, and is currently on display at the Jacobsburg Historical Society Museum in Nazareth, PA.



Davis & Elkins College, Colonial Williamsburg, and at Old Salem Village in NC.

He has worked on several special horn related projects that had a special meaning to him. In 2007 and again in 2009, he was commissioned by the National Rifle Association to make the special engraved presentation horn for the outgoing President of the NRA. In addition, he was asked to participate in the "Nine Horn Project" fundraising auction project for the CLA in 2004, which proved instrumental in raising

He is a member of the HCH, the Kentucky Rifle Association, the NMLRA, a charter member of the CLA, and a life member of the NRA.

It was surprising to learn that Art had missed the first two Horn Guild meetings, and did not join the Guild till the third meeting which was held at Davis & Elkins College, in Elkins, West Virginia, in 1998. Since that time Art has been a major contributor to the growth and success of our Guild and we are fortunate indeed to include him as a "Master" on our rolls. ■