

# Bill Conroy: Pipe Carver

—Photos by Robert Saperstein

By STANLEY D. SAPERSTEIN

Did you ever feel like burning a carving when you were finished because you did not like it? Well, Bill Conroy burns all his carvings, not because he doesn't like them, but because he loves them. Doesn't make sense? Well, if you carve pipes it makes a lot of sense because they all go up in smoke.

A fairly new member to NWCA and the New Jersey Central Branch, Bill is a most welcomed addition and he is delighted to share his knowledge of pipe carving.

A long-time pipe collector with a valuable collection of pipes from Germany, England, India, Argentina, Belgium and China (some dating back to 1801), it was not until about two years ago that Bill attempted to carve his own.

After studying many books on the history of pipes and becoming more and more interested in the art, he decided to give pipe carving a try. Encouraged with the results of his first attempt using only a knife, Bill began hunting for small antique carving tools. Being a good machinist was also an asset; Bill makes many of his special tools to fit particular needs.

A pipe takes him anywhere from three to 200 hours, depending on the complexity of the design. The bear pipe accompanying this article took 200 hours to complete. Briarwood, a dried out root, is extremely hard.

Bill advises beginners to buy a cheap pipe and practice carving on it to get



This unusual briar pipe was designed and carved by Bill Conroy.

“the feel” of the wood. Genuine briar blocks for carving may be purchased from pipe companies. Walnut, ebony, cherry and other hardwoods may also be used along with meerschaum (hydrous magnesium silicate) a fine white clay which holds detail well but is brittle.

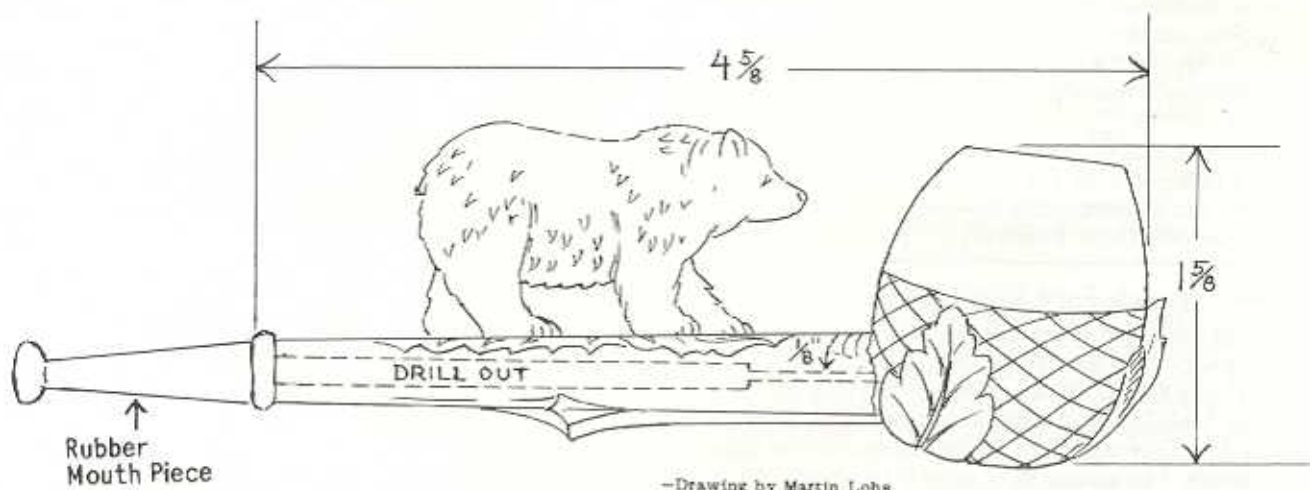
Now for a little how-to-do. To make a pipe from scratch, start with a block large enough to include the wooden stem part. Band saw or cope out your shape. Center the stem and bowl of the pipe. Drill out the bowl and stem.

Before drilling the stem, buy your rubber mouthpiece and measure the diameter to be inserted into the wood stem. Don't drill all the way into the bowl; go about half way and switch to a 1/8-inch drill or smaller to finish. It more or less depends on how hard you want the draw to be. After drilling, carve or whittle the design.

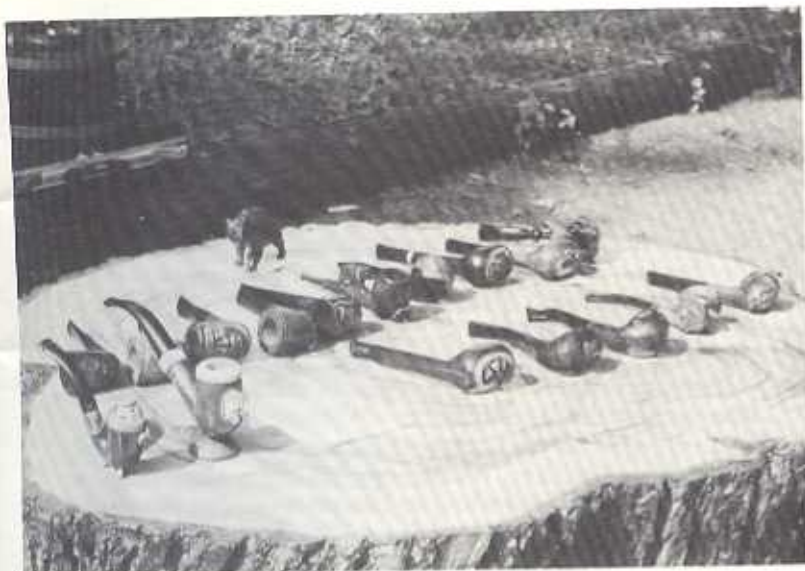
A little background on Bill: he lives at 122 Summit Ave., Trenton, N.J., and has always been great with his hands—a skilled mechanic and machinist, wood carving has come easy. A mechanical trouble shooter for a reproduction roller skater in his early 20s and taught skating for many years. After breaking a leg several years ago, Bill, who is 57, decided to find another hobby—pipe collecting and then carving took roller skating's place.

Bill, who is partially deaf and can't talk on the phone, doesn't let the handicap stop him from getting his message across. His devoted wife Marge also is a great help in this direction.

Bill is interested in corresponding with other carvers who make pipes and would like to swap patterns. Persons wishing to purchase a Conroy original







A display of the wide variety of briar pipes carved by Bill Conroy; closeup shows polished details.

pipe can write for prices.

Pattern for the bear pipe is actual size and a real challenge for advanced carvers. Simpler designs are better for beginners, or, as Bill suggests, buy a cheap pipe and set about carving it—use your imagination.

There is added pleasure in smoking a pipe you carved yourself, and if you don't care for smoking, carve a pipe for a friend who does enjoy it.



### Woodcarvers Tool Chest Expands

Alan Pechner, proprietor of The Woodcarvers Tool Chest, 14 West 21st St., Deer Park, N.Y. 11729, announces expansion of its stock of carving tools and accessories. The firm carries Pana vises, Wetzel clamps, Henry Taylor chip carving knives, and Acorn brand carving tools, mallets, Bear Norton sharpening stones, Schrade Old Timer knives, books, etc. A copy of the new catalog is available for 35 cents.

### Buckeye Wood Available

American Woodcrafters, I-75 and Route 36, Piqua, Ohio have a limited amount of premium buckeye lumber 3 inches thick by 10 to 12 inches wide suitable for carving. American Woodcrafters offers classes in woodcarving, basic cabinetry and woodturning. Write or phone 778-1942 for full particulars.

### Carving Tools By Herral

NWCA member Rex Herral hand forges a variety of gouges and curved knives for wood carving. Prices start at \$10, postpaid. Rex operates his shop at his farm, 8/10 mile east of Wilburn, Ark. (near Heber Springs) and visitors are always welcome. In addition to hand forging a number of other items, Rex also does a lot of lathe turning work. His mailing address is: Herral Craft Shop, Wilburn, Ark. 72179.

### Cold Weather Fails To Stop Party

In spite of the extremely cold weather, a good portion of our members and their spouses, relatives and friends attended the Christmas party of the Greater New York Chapter, December 21. Many brought carvings to show and carvings to exchange via the grab bag. The ladies added to the pleasantly informal evening by bringing cakes and pastries of every description and pots of hot coffee to wash down the goodies.

Bud Connelly reported our treasury to be in good condition and Thad Giza had the honor of being the first to pay dues for 1977.

Roland Reich's Great Seal of the United States was admired by all as were pieces brought in by Stan Rezin, Arthur LaGue, Hans Hallex, Bill Bunger, and Leonard Drake.

As always, everyone was pleased with the carvings picked from the grab bag and all went home having enjoyed a pleasant evening.—Leonard S. Drake, secretary, 463-6226.

### Scrimshaw Classes

NWCA member Andrew Daniele, Hazlet, N.J., will conduct a class in scrimshaw work at Battleground Arts Center, Freehold, N.J. The five week course begins February 5 at 10 a.m. Andrew is an accomplished carver in bone and ivory as well as wood.