

Art Treasures Are Made in Mountain Factory

By A. H.

"Look at this beautiful thing!" exclaimed a summer visitor in a Berkshire gift shop as she picked up a graceful rosewood bowl. "It's stamped 'Salisbury Artisans.' I wonder what kind of a shop turns out things like this."

If the inquiring lady ever found her way to Washinee Street, Salisbury, she must have discovered a colorful answer to her question. For here, sprawled on the green hip of Mount Riga, is a bustling industry; as individual as its products, as native as its setting.

Operating under the name of the Salisbury Cutlery Handle Factory, the shop in which the Salisbury Artisans do their unique work is literally in the woods. The several red buildings, which look like remodeled barns, stand on the hillside clearing which slopes above the rippled surface of a little pond.

No newcomer, the Cutlery Handle Factory was founded in 1880 by one Charles Keyworth of Sheffield, England. In those days wood handles were little used, and the Riga workmen worked principally in bone, ivory and horn. Here discriminating buyers could obtain the much prized handles of genuine "stag"; ivory handled table knives, or clever copies of stag handles carved from the shin bones of steer by specially trained artisans who worked on hand-operated machines.



"Hand-turned, hand-rubbed to satin smoothness" . . . Philip Warner inspects a new bowl just completed by Richie Parsons. Photo by HARDENBERGH

Warner, who has a deep love for the latent beauty in wood, had always been disturbed by the necessary disregard for the grain pattern in the manufacture of knife handles. He was delighted to give the waste to people who would bring out its beauty. Two years ago he hit on the idea of advertising chunks and cuttings of rare hardwoods in Popular

cocobolo into graceful shapes revealing the natural wine-rich color and rippling grain.

Less than a year ago Salisbury Artisans was a fledgling branch of the Cutlery Handle Industry. Now, with its retail shop and office housed in a scarlet-trimmed building on the factory grounds, it is a going concern with a dozen different products finding favor in specialty and gift shops all over the country.

Hand-turned and hand-rubbed to satin smoothness, its bowls are named for roads and sections in the town of Salisbury. Ore Hill, Lime Rock, Mt. Riga, etc. A hand-made silver ladle joins a hand-turned ebony handle for the heirloom treasure named "White Hollow." Delicately hollowed miniature rosewood salt cups with acorn spoons; smooth, tapered ebony muddlers, chopping bowls copied from the pride and joy of a French cuisiniere; pepper mills; Bavarian cutting boards for herbs and cheeses . . . these are some of the products already developed.

Like the tumbling waters of the Riga stream, Wachacastinook, which feeds the lower pond, this little factory is never static. There is a feeling of action and growth about the

place, a sense of buoyancy. At any moment the rosewood-scented air



"The naturally gifted hands" . . . Richie Parsons turning a Salisbury Artisans bowl. Photo by HARDENBERGH

ously and as spontaneously quieted. For the men in this mountain shop are more than mere fellow workers. They are close neighbors who have a way of life, a rugged tradition, and an untamed, unconquerable mountain in common. The owner, too, is no mere "small business man." The life of the factory is like a thread woven in his family's pattern. Its continuance does not merely spell personal success, but the livelihood and well-being of the friends and neighbors who are his co-workers. Perhaps it is fancy, but it seems possible, that these factors added luster and grace to the bowl in the summer visitor's hand . . . and made her exclaim: "Look at this beautiful thing!"

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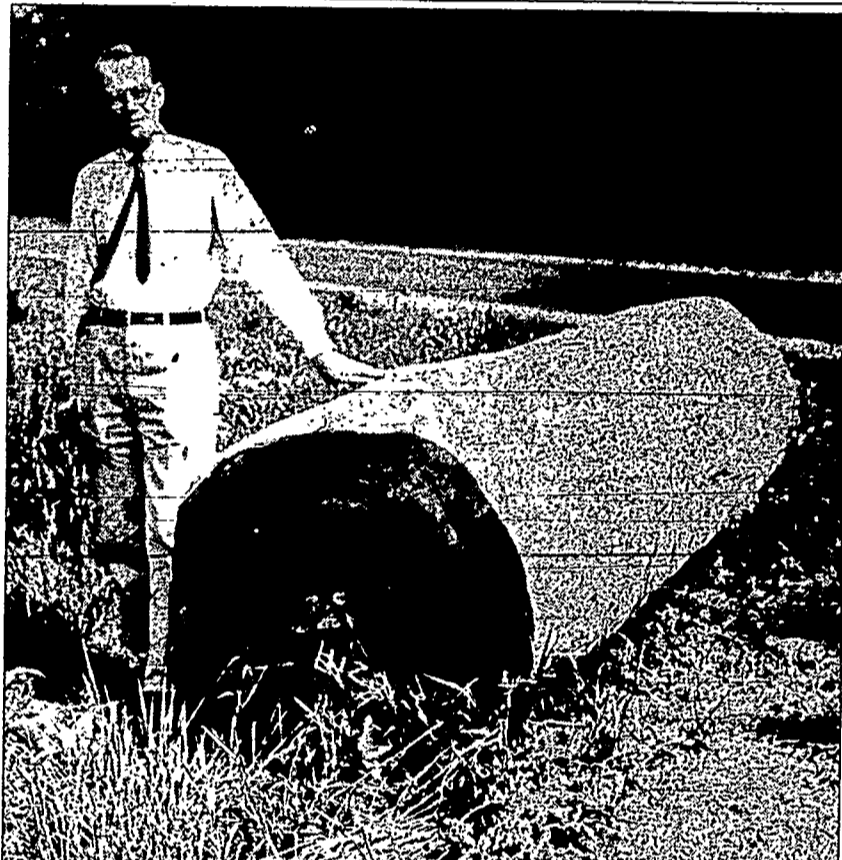
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"Carcasses of . . . hardwoods . . . unloaded in the factory clearing." Mr. Warner with a typical log of rosewood. Photo by HARDENBERGH

Continuously, since its beginning, the factory has been local; owned, managed and manned by people of the town. In 1884 it became the property of a community syndicate which included such locally familiar names as Barnum and Richardson (Ironmasters of Lime Rock in that village's mining heyday); Porter Burrall, and Donald T. and Donald J. Warner, father and grandfather of the present manager, Philip Warner.

Mr. Warner started his personal connection with the shop in the shipping department in 1916. In 1925 he took over the management from William P. Everts who had held the post from 1890.

This little industry must derive some kind of indomitable vitality from its native mountain, for it has survived blows which would have erased a less sturdy enterprise. In 1928 the entire original factory, which was located higher on the mountain, was destroyed by fire. The plant was moved to the turning shop at lower pond, only to be again razed by fire in 1935. The present remodeled farm buildings were first used as emergency housing for the machinery but when found to be adequate were retained as the permanent factory.

By 1928 the fashion of bone and horn handles had waned and, after the fire, Mr. Warner determined to manufacture only wooden handles. Since these must be made of hardwood, the import of rosewood and cocobolo, gonzalo alives and the ebones was begun.

Little by little the shop was fooled to make handles swiftly and deftly for all kinds of knives, from small kitchen parers to carvers. Ingenious devices were introduced, many of them by men, whose fathers and grandfathers were skilled handle-makers in the same factory. Huge carloads of the rare and beautiful hardwoods were unloaded in the factory clearing, rolled into the saws, cut into chunks and chopped and beveled by machines into handles for kitchen knives.

As the pile of handles grew, so also did the pile of unused chunks. Knife buyers coming to place orders would ask for pieces of rosewood or ebony to take home to carve. Mr.

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The response was amazing and led to many interesting and piquant contacts with craftsmen all over the country.

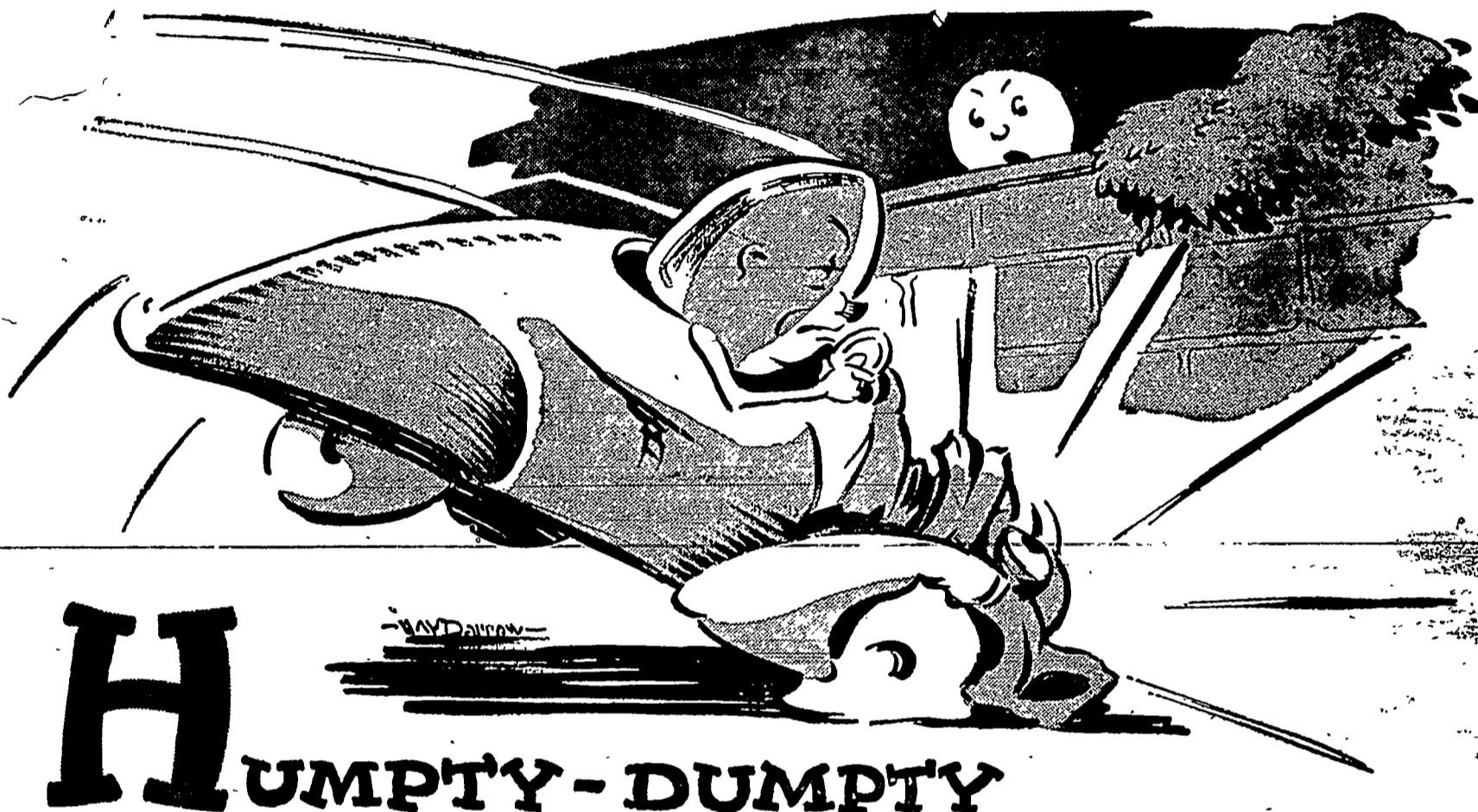


"As the pile of handles grew . . . so did the pile of unused chunks" . . . Claude Marks with a section of rosewood. Photo by HARDENBERGH

"We got one letter from a man in the penitentiary," Mr. Warner told us. "He asked about our woods for carving and we packed him a box of our complete assortment. When he wrote to thank us, he asked what breed of dog I preferred and two weeks after I replied he sent me this . . ." he gestured with his pipe toward an exquisite carving of a red setter, perfect in every detail and obviously the work of an artist.

"My prisoner friend tells me that he can carve forty different breeds of dogs," Mr. Warner continued.

From this association with artists and craftsmen, it was only a short step to the development of the Salisbury Artisans department in the factory itself. The material was at hand. The necessary re-tooling could be accomplished. Willard May from Jackson, N. H. was the first to actually turn bowls in the shop. Then Richie Parsons took over the work. Son and grandson of Salisbury workers in wood, Richie has the naturally gifted hands required to change raw hunks of rosewood or



HUMPTY-DUMPTY

hit a stone wall,
After too many drinks from the keg;
His car took fire - made a funeral pyre,
And now he's just a fried egg!



Funny? No!—Humpty Dumpty's kind of death is only stupid—and criminal.

Look at the facts: Drinking drivers cause one out of every five highway deaths. When innocent victims perish, too, that's manslaughter! It must be dealt with by strict laws, strictly enforced.

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