



Winter  
2024

## Charlene Lynum: From Chip Carving Master to Acanthus Carving Artist

Charlene Lynum, renowned among woodcarvers as one of the finest chip carvers in the United States, has recently expanded her artistic repertoire into the world of acanthus carving. Known for her precision, intricate designs, and passion for the craft, Charlene's latest work exemplifies her continuous drive to master new skills and bring fresh beauty to her creations.

### A New Challenge: Mastering Acanthus Carving

Charlene's journey into acanthus carving began with her participation in a three-day intensive class led by master carver Hans Sandem (Born in Norway), who is also a highly respected instructor at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa. The class, held in River Falls, provided Charlene with the opportunity to delve deep into this ancient and highly detailed form of carving. Under Sandem's expert guidance, she learned the intricate techniques needed to bring acanthus leaves to life in wood.

Charlene has also expanded her knowledge through studying with Phillip Odin, another esteemed carver known for his mastery in traditional Scandinavian styles. These experiences have given Charlene a solid foundation in acanthus carving, allowing her to explore its potential while incorporating her own unique style.

### The Clock Project: A Fusion of Skill and Creativity

One of Charlene's most recent and impressive creations is a hand-carved clock that showcases her newly acquired acanthus carving skills. The project, a product of her class with Hans Sandem, exemplifies the classic elements of the style—elegant, flowing leaf patterns intricately carved into the wood. The clock mechanism was sourced from Hobby Lobby, allowing Charlene to focus her efforts on the craftsmanship of the wooden exterior.



Clock Mechanism installed in Acanthus carved housing and stand - Charlene

This piece not only demonstrates her proficiency with acanthus carving but also highlights her ability to seamlessly blend her chip carving expertise with new techniques. The result is a stunning work of art that merges functionality with timeless beauty.

### What is Acanthus Carving?

Acanthus carving is a traditional form of ornamental woodcarving that dates back over two thousand years to Classical Greece and Rome. It draws its inspiration from the acanthus plant, known for its deeply lobed and ruffled leaves. The style gained prominence in ancient architecture, particularly in the Corinthian columns that adorned temples and other significant structures. Over the centuries, it has been revived and refined by various cultures, especially during the Renaissance and Baroque periods, when it became a popular motif in furniture, moldings, and decorative panels.

# Cottonwood Bark Carving with Dale McAleese Whimsical Houses from bark

The Whimsical Abodes of Cottonwood Bark: An Art Form Both Humble and Enchanting

In a quiet corner of the Northlands, nestled among the rolling hills and sprawling forests of Wisconsin, there lives a carver of remarkable skill and patience. Dale McAleese of New Richmond, WI, is his name, and his craft is that of carving whimsical houses from the bark of the cottonwood tree. To gaze upon his work is to peer into a miniature world where magic and nature entwine, a world filled with crooked chimneys, winding stairways, and tiny stone pathways that seem to beckon the viewer into realms unseen.

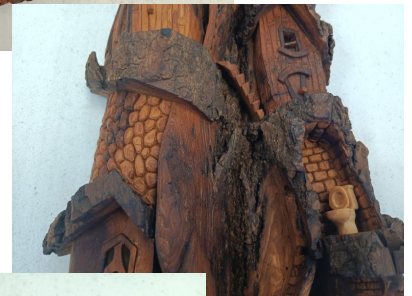
The Quest for the Perfect Bark

Like a ranger seeking out the finest wood for his bow, Dale embarks on a quest each time he searches for the right piece of bark. He roams the woodlands of Wisconsin, keeping a keen eye out for downed cottonwood trees. Not all bark is fit for carving; it must have the right thickness, texture, and character—qualities that only a true master of the craft can discern.

The cottonwood tree, ancient and noble, offers its bark to those who know how to ask. And Dale, with his understanding of the land and its secrets, has learned to listen. He speaks of the bark as if it were a living partner in his artistry, guiding his hand and inspiring his vision. "Sometimes, it's easy to see what the bark wants to be," he muses, suggesting that within each piece, there lies a hidden story, waiting to be told. A knot might suggest a window, a bulge a crooked chimney, and a deep groove the foundation for a sturdy little cottage.

Cleansing and Preparing the Bark

Before Dale can begin his work, the bark must be cleansed of the soil, dust, and time that clings to it. With brushes and water, he carefully washes away the dirt, revealing the hidden potential beneath. But not all impurities can be washed away with water. Embedded within the fibers of the bark, there may lie hidden particles of silica—grains of sand that dull the edge of a blade as surely as any stone. Thus, a carver must always be vigilant, keeping his tools sharp and his wits sharper.





## The Craft of Carving

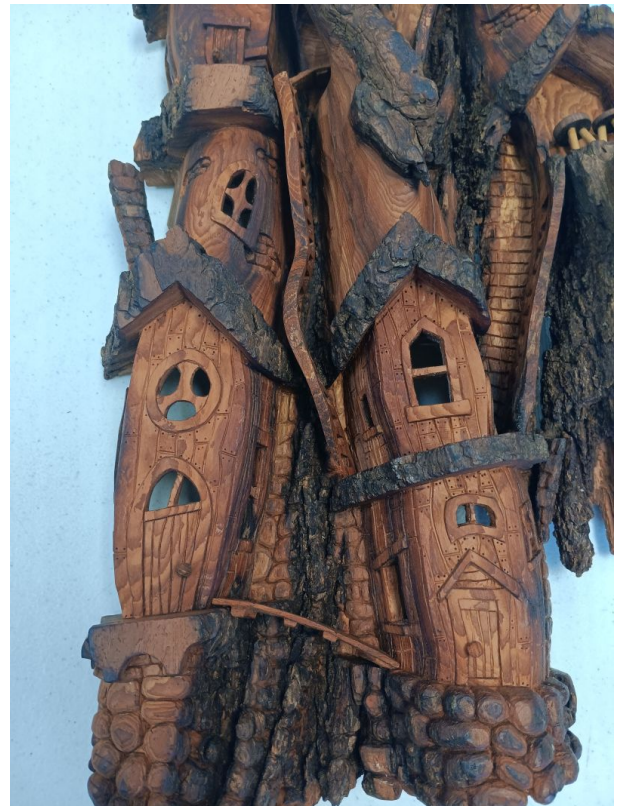
Once the bark is prepared, the true art begins. With knife in hand and a mind full of imagination, Dale sets to work. He carves not with the rigid precision of a carpenter, but with the free spirit of a storyteller. His whimsical houses emerge slowly from the bark, their forms dictated not by rigid plans but by the natural contours and bends of the wood. As with all great works, flexibility and adaptation are key. The bark can be fickle and frail, with hidden weaknesses that reveal themselves only under the carver's touch. And when a piece breaks, as they sometimes do, a bit of glue and a touch of creative thinking can turn what might seem a disaster into an opportunity for new and unexpected beauty.



## The Charm of the Whimsical Houses

Dale's carvings are as charming as they are unpredictable. The houses do not stand straight and tall like the manors of the rich and powerful. Instead, they lean and twist, their doors askew, their chimneys bent, and their windows uneven, as if they were grown rather than built. Many pieces of bark hold more than one house—sometimes a whole village—connected by winding stairways, crooked ladders, and rickety rope bridges. These tiny communities, nestled together on a single piece of bark, create a world that invites the imagination to wander.

Look closely, and you will see a hundred tiny details that breathe life into the wood: a crooked chimney that seems to defy gravity, a tiny stoop where a weary traveler might rest, or a narrow stairway that winds up to a hidden door. In one particularly curious piece, Dale has carved a small toilet, complete with a tiny door, while in another, he has created a pair of milking stools, set off to the side as if awaiting the morning's chores. Each detail tells a story and suggests the life of unseen inhabitants.



## The Mastery of a True Carver

Dale's work with cottonwood bark is more than mere carving; it is a dance with nature, a dialogue between man and tree. The stonework that supports the houses, the twisting stairs, the bent ladders—all serve to ground these fantastical creations in a sense of reality, while still maintaining an air of the otherworldly. His pieces evoke a sense of wonder and whimsy, capturing the beauty of imperfection and the magic that lies hidden in the ordinary.

Yet the work is not without its trials. The bark, though

malleable, is also fragile. A sudden misstep, a moment's loss of concentration, and a piece might break away. But like all great artists, Dale has learned to adapt. He keeps glue at hand, ready to mend breaks and turn misfortunes into blessings. In this way, each carving becomes a testament not only to his skill but to his patience and perseverance as well.

# Jeanne Henning Showcases Two Carving Projects

## Jeanne Henning Showcases Exceptional Carving Projects

At the recent Chippewa Falls Club Gathering, Jeanne Henning captivated fellow members with two outstanding carving projects, each demonstrating her remarkable skill and artistry.

The first piece was an enchanting study of three bear cubs perched on a tree limb, backlit by a luminous full moon. This project was completed in the intricate intaglio style, a technique Jeanne learned in a September class taught by Greg Wirtz. Intaglio carving, derived from the Italian word meaning "to cut into," involves engraving designs into the surface of the wood, creating delicate, recessed lines and patterns. The result is a highly detailed and textured composition, where shadows and depth play a significant role in bringing the scene to life. Jeanne's mastery of this technique was evident in the careful detail and the atmospheric quality of the moonlit setting.

Her second project was an exquisite depiction of an owl carved in butternut wood, showcasing the beauty of low-relief or bas-relief carving. This piece was created under the guidance of the Stenmans,



who taught the fundamentals of this classic style. In bas-relief carving, the design is sculpted to project slightly from the wood's surface, creating a subtle yet striking three-dimensional effect. Jeanne's owl was a testament to her ability to use depth and contour to highlight the natural elegance of the subject, making it a standout piece.

Both projects drew admiration from members, who were inspired by Jeanne's dedication and craftsmanship. Her work not only reflects her talent but also highlights the diverse carving techniques explored and celebrated within the Guild. Jeanne's contributions serve as an inspiration for all, showcasing the boundless creativity that carving can bring to life.





## Annual Old Abe's Party Brings Cheer and Celebration!

### **Guild Seasonal Party Brings Cheer and Celebration!**

On November 7th, the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild gathered for their highly anticipated Seasonal Party, and what an evening it was! Held at 5:00 PM, the event welcomed over 18 members and their spouses to a night filled with camaraderie, delicious food, and festive spirits. The atmosphere was electric as friends and fellow carvers reunited to share stories, laughter, and the joy of the season.

The highlight of the evening was undoubtedly the exquisite dinner provided by Old Abe's, renowned for its outstanding cuisine. Their Prime Rib dinners lived up to the hype, earning rave reviews from all in attendance. Guests savored every bite, with many remarking that Old Abe's truly has mastered the art of preparing a perfect Prime Rib. To complement the meal, Brandy Old-Fashioneds flowed freely, praised for their expertly balanced flavors and smooth finish. The bar staff outdid themselves, crafting beverages that perfectly set the tone for the evening.

This delightful gathering was thoughtfully organized by Del Braunberger, whose meticulous planning ensured that everything ran smoothly. From the warm welcome at the door to the perfectly timed dinner service, every detail was handled with care, making the evening truly special. Del's hard work and dedication to the Guild were evident in every aspect of the event, earning him heartfelt thanks and recognition from attendees.

In addition to enjoying good food and great company, the Guild took a moment to bid a fond farewell to Jan Jenson, who is embarking on her winter tour of Texas. With heartfelt wishes and cheerful toasts, members sent her off with plenty of love and laughter. Jan's contributions to the Guild have left a lasting impact, and her presence will be missed during the colder months. However, the warmth of the send-off ensured she carries



the spirit of the Guild with her on her journey.

The Seasonal Party also served as a reminder of the deep sense of community that defines the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild. Beyond the delicious meals and festive drinks, it was the conversations, the shared memories, and the genuine connections that truly made the night unforgettable. Members lingered long after dinner, enjoying the chance to reconnect and look forward to the upcoming projects and events the Guild has planned.

The Seasonal Party was a resounding success, showcasing the strong sense of community and joy that defines the West Wisconsin Wood Carvers Guild. It was a night to remember, filled with laughter, gratitude, and a shared love for the art of carving. Here's to more wonderful events in the future, as the Guild continues to thrive and grow!