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THE AMERICAN SPIRIT

FOLK ART

1. BASEBALL FIGURE

This 19th Century wooden figure of a baseball player carries the name BRIGGS on the front. It is believed to have stood outside of the Briggs Manufacturing Company which made sporting goods equipment.

Loaned by Hopkins Center Art Galleries, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire.

2. TOTEM POLE

This thirty-foot pole was carved in 1939 at the Indian exhibit in the Federal Building at the San Francisco Exposition. The carvers were two Haida Indians, John Wallace and his son, Fred. John Wallace was eighty years old and, as the third in a line of totem pole carvers, is a complete master of all the techniques and traditions of the art. The pole was carved and painted in approximately four months.

The cedar log was placed in a horizontal position on low trestles. Before the carving began, a fairly deep hollow was made in what was to be the back of the pole, in order to lessen the risk of cracking. The major units of the design were first outlined with chalk and then roughed out with an axe. Next followed the long process of cutting away the background with adzes in order to bring out the figures of the design in relief. The final small details were carved with knives and chisels. Each of these three steps was begun at the top and carried down to the bottom. After all carving was completed, the pole was painted with ordinary house paint.

Totem pole carving was restricted to the Northwest Coast Indians and had its fullest development in the mid-nineteenth century. It was an outgrowth of an older custom of carving house roof supports and was made possible by two influences, the large-scale introduction of metal tools into the area, and the rapid development of the Indians' wealth through the fur trade. There are no very ancient poles in existence today because they rot in the damp climate and fall to the ground in sixty to seventy years. Fallen poles were often cut up into firewood.

Totem poles are not idols and are not made to be worshipped. They either display family crests or relate family legends, and were erected as memorials to dead leaders and as symbols of family

2. TOTEM POLE (cont'd)

pride and wealth. It is impossible to "read" the designs because the significance of each figure is determined by the owner and not in accordance with any general system. The carver arranges the figures on a pole in accordance with his taste, and not in the order in which they appear in the story or genealogy. Even the sequence of figures on two poles telling the same story is not identical.

The pole illustrated tells a family legend. Raven dives to the bottom of the ocean finds totem poles at the home of Killer Whale, and with the aid of various creatures brings one to the surface and gives it to the Indians.

Loaned by the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, United States Department of the Interior.

3. INDIAN WEATHERVANE

This ten-foot high weathervane is "St. Tamany" - a large Indian wearing a feather headdress and holding a bow and arrow. It has been simplified to be recognizable from a distance.

Loaned by The Museum of Early American Folk Art.

4. GRANITE EAGLE

The value of this sculpture is $2,500.00. This piece of statuary was a gift of the Pennsylvania Railroad, through the courtesy of Mr. Stuart T. Saunders, Chairman of the Board to the National Zoological Park and Smithsonian Institution. From 1910 to 1965, this granite eagle was one of 22 birds that graced the old Pennsylvania Station in New York City which was designed by the architectural firm of McKim, Mead and White. The statue was placed in the National Zoo on June 23, 1965. Its composition is granite ranging from light gray to pink gray in color. It weighs 5,700 lbs. Its measurements are: width of eagle, 72", height of eagle and base, 64", height of eagle, 58". The center claw of each foot extends 2½" over front of the base. The wings extend 10" over sides of the base. The statue has a rough sand-like texture finish.

The Pennsylvania Railroad Station, one of the best known buildings in New York City, will be torn down and replaced by a hugh "Palace of Progress" building. The new building will have space for wholesale markets, offices, and some 200 permanent exhibits from many countries. The old building fills 7½ acres of midtown Manhattan and serves some 200,000 train passengers a day.

5. ADIRONDACK GUIDEBOAT

The typical Adirondack guideboat is an exceptionally light rowboat, sharp at both ends, and between about 14 and about 16 feet long. Boats of this kind were developed and built in the

5. ADIRONDACK GUIDEBOAT (cont'd)

Adirondacks from some time around the middle of the last century to roughly 1960, when the last professional craftsmen who made them died. They were usually built of local woods - spruce, white pine, white cedar, and cherry - and they were developed to meet local needs. But this prosaic description fails to convey the superb heights of craftsmanship to which these boats were carried; their significance as indicators of the cultural patterns of the Adirondacks; or the romance which surrounds them even now in many minds.

As soon as white men began to travel extensively through the Adirondacks, the need for such a boat was felt. This is a rugged region which was not settled to any significant degree until long after the rest of New York State was a sophisticated and civilized community - a region which, indeed, was hardly penetrated except by scientists, woodsmen, and a sprinkling of hardy settlers until the middle of the 19th century. Roads were few, and even these were mostly rudimentary. At first they used Indian-made canoes or such boats as they had, but soon it became evident that specially-adapted boats were needed. To be useful in the Adirondacks, a boat had to be able to carry a substantial load in safety on the big lakes, and handy enough to use in the narrow and twisting rivers. Because the waterways are not continuous in the Adirondacks, the boat also had to be light enough for one man to carry on his back.

They have certain special characteristics. They are built up from a bottom board, to which the ribs are attached to form a basic structure. To these ribs, thin "strakes" or "planks" are fastened to form the skin of the boat. No thwarts or cross-braces are used. The shape of the boat is achieved by the use of elaborate and detailed sets of patterns, and modern wooden-boat specialists suggest that the construction of a guideboat involves more patterns and less "rule of thumb" than does that of any other wooden boat. No caulking is used, water tight integrity being achieved by the precision of all joints. The planks themselves are extremely thin, being as little as 3/16 of an inch thick in some cases. They are joined to the ribs by very small brass screws, and to each other along their edges by literally thousands of tiny copper tacks driven completely through and clenched on the reverse side to form rivets. The all-important ribs must be both extremely strong and extremely light, and so they are sawed from the root buttresses of spruce stumps, which are cut in such a way that the natural grain of the wood follows the curve of the rib.

The boats were ordinarily equipped both with very light spruce oars, and also with a paddle for use in narrow streams, for use in hunting from the boat, and for a passenger who wanted to help share the work. The seats, which came out easily, were merely woven cane with a light wooden framework. An indispensible accessory was a yoke like the familiar milkmaid's yoke, which fitten over the guide's shoulders and whose ends fitted into the so-called "yoke cleats" in the center of the boat, so that the boat itself,

5. ADIRONDACK GUIDEBOAT (cont'd)

with its oars and seats lashed in, could be turned upside down and carried on the guide's back across the trail to the next pond.

By its very nature, such a boat must be superlatively well built. No crudity of construction can be tolerated, since every member is pared down to the lightest possible weight. Maximum strength must be extracted from minimum material, and so fine-drawn craftsmanship must substitute for the margin of safety achieved by mere bulk.

The guideboat reached a flowering of development about the turn of the century and few or no real improvements were introduced after that. Life changed even in the lagging Adirondacks, and with the change the need for the specialized guideboat began to decline. Today the last craftsman is gone.

Loaned by The Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake, New York.

6. ANGEL WEATHERVANE

The wrought-iron "Angel Gabriel" weathervane also from The Adirondack Museum indicated the winds for more than 130 years from a sawmill roof in Wevertown, New York. Its weathered iron scroll work is so fragile that special shipping procedures had to be worked out for its transportation to the United States Pavilion at EXPO 67. The Angel Gabriel was a familiar figure on the rooftops, especially church steeples, in the northeastern United States.

7. WOOTON'S PATENTED DESK

This desk, of which a number were produced by The Wooton Desk Co. of Indianapolis, Indiana, was patented by William S. Wooton of Marion County, Indianapolis, Indiana on October 6, 1874. This particular desk was made by the Wooton Desk Co. for Spencer F. Baird, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. in 1875. A similar desk was also made and presented by the Company to President U.S. Grant during his Presidency. The latter desk is presently in the White House Collections. Other desks are known to have been made for various influential individuals during the 1870's. A more modest and cheaper version was made for the general market.

In their 1876 sales catalog, the Wooton Desk Co. states "The unprecedented sale of these celebrated Desks in this and other countries, leads us to believe that they will produce a complete revolution in Office Desks. Agencies have been established for their sale in the principal cities of the United States, and many of the leading countries of the world, making them conveniently accessible for examination by all designing to inspect or purchase."

The exterior cases are constructed of black walnut, polished French veneers and rich carvings, contrasted with black and gold,

7. WOOTON'S PATENTED DESK (cont'd)

according to the grade. The interior cases are of clear and beautiful woods, such as pine, poplar, maple, and similar woods with fine marquetry and inlaid borders. The hardware is made expressly to suit the requirements of each part, and is of ornamental Berlin bronze, real solid bronze or gold enameled. The writing leaf is supported by an ingenious automatic device, making it a perfectly solid table when in position for use. The letter-box is a convenience which has only to be used to be appreciated. The filing boxes in the wings are another convenience, and are furnished with a uniform set of labels in the grades named in the description.

The desk was truly a Victorian status symbol, satisfying the Victorian's taste for novelty and elegance. It was an expensive desk and therefore owned by some of the most prominent men in America such as Jay Gould, Sidney Lanier, John D. Rockefeller, Joseph Pulitzer and others.

The stationery exhibited with this desk was that used and left in the desk by Secretary Baird.

Loaned by The Smithsonian Institution.

8. TAVERN SIGNS

The tavern sign relives an era when the country moved more slowly and the tavern gave the traveler not only his necessary food and shelter but entertainment as well. Often the itinerant circus traveler with his bear or lion would put on his show in the evenings at the local tavern where he would lodge. The informality of the inns and the assortment of people, the blazing fire in the fireplace in the winter fell under the category of entertainment, which the inns were proud to advertise. J. Carter's "Stranger's Resort" shows a military man and a civilian (their hats are oddly suspended in the air at each corner of the sign) with a jug of wine between them.

Sign painting was a useful craft and essential to the economy during the Colonial period. Often, carvers, cabinetmakers and blacksmiths had important parts in producing the finished sign. Signs became well known and were often used in newspaper advertisements.

1. "Entertainment by R. Angell": Sign made for Richard Angell's tavern in Providence, R.I., 1808.

2. "Entertainment by C. Baker": Location and date unknown.

3. "A. Bissell": Reverse side says "J. Alderman". One side was repainted. South Windsor, Conn., 1760.

8. TAVERN SIGNS (cont'd)

4. "Entertainment": The house this sign adorned is still standing. This was a common name for taverns. Saybrook Point, on North Cove, Conn.

5. "The Scales of Justice": 1794. The inscription reads: M. Blatchly The Scales of Justice The Charming Patroness Entertainment M.B. The reverse pattern was an American flag.

6. "Railroad House W. Bursley": This sign is unusual for its early picture of a railroad train on one side and a paddle wheel gunboat on the other; Barnstable, Mass.

7. "Geo. A. Chafee": 1840. George Austin Chafee was a hotel and restaurant keeper in Middletown, Conn. who, in 1870, built a steam vessel which ran between Portland and New York City, naming it for himself.

8. "A. Chesebro Hotel": 1821. Location unknown.

9. "Crowfoot's Inn". Date and location unknown. This was one of several punning signs.

10. "Stranger's Home": 1823-1851. Inscription reads: Stranger's Home Z. Dyer. The reverse reads: Hold or Drive Z. Dyer. The house where it hung is still occupied by the Dyer Family.

11. "S. Harrington": 1833. Location unknown.

12. "J. Porter". This tavern was licensed in 1781.

13. "J. Spencer": 1810. The design is the Pennsylvania coat of arms.

14. "Temperance". Date and location unknown.

15. "A Wightman's Inn". Date and location unknown.

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