

TURNING FOR FURNITUREMAKERS July 14-16, 2005

I recently had the good fortune to attend a workshop at the Lonnie Bird's School of Fine Woodworking. Lonnie has recently established a hands-on woodworking school in the rolling hills of East Tennessee, in Dandridge (about 5 hours driving time from the Triangle). Lonnie is very well known for as a period furnituremaker and carver, and has published widely on these topics (see the selected book and magazine references below).

You can view the class listings at <http://www.lonniebird.com/index.htm>. Classes include the following: Woodworking Essentials, Turning for Furnituremakers, Build a Dressing Table, Mastering Dovetails, Fundamentals of Joinery, Eighteenth Century Carving, Build an Eighteenth Century Pennsylvania Side Chair, Mastering Fine Casework, Tuning and Using Handplanes, Build a Period Armchair, Build a Tall Case Clock.

The Turning for Furnituremakers class was three days. I was inspired by several local woodturners (Al Basham, Alan Leeland, and Frank Penta) to make a set of short handled spindle tools for this class (picture 1)

The school is attached to his house and consists of 3 floors (pictures 2-4). The bottom floor is a power tool room, the middle room is a classroom with individual workbenches for each student. The upper floor is storage and restroom facilities. The bench room has lots of windows and is filled with light (pictures 5-8). From our windows we could look down into a pasture where a newborn colt was frolicking and being jealously guarded by its mother.

The costs of the workshops are very competitive. Local will motels (Super 8 in particular) offer room discounts (10%) to Lonnie's students. Considering the proximity to the Triangle, the superlative classroom conditions and the small class size, and the opportunity to learn from a true master, this is a great deal.

1. On the first day we focused on learning how to turn beads, coves and combinations (picture 9). We also learned how to sharpen lathe tools. Lonnie introduced the concept of storey boards. These are a half-profile drawing of a project, with all dimensions and transitions indicated. The drawing is glued to quarter inch ply and used to lay out the details of the project after the blank has been turned to a cylinder. We made one of these for every project (picture 10). For many of us this was a first chance to focus intensively in this way.
2. The second day was devoted to refining our tool skills, particularly riding the bevel and learning to eye the "horizon" when refining shapes on the lathe. We also worked at being able to turn to the specifications of a drawing, and to be able to do this repetitively. Not such an easy task!
3. On the last day we made use of our storey boards and turned objects that would be part of period furniture details (picture 11). These included a Colonial style doorstop (a good choice for an easy-to-make and unique gift!), finials that could be incorporated into a bed, a clock or a desk, and turned Empire style feet. We also learned about turning columns (and quarter columns) as decorative elements on a clock, for example (picture 12 is an example of a clock with carving, finials and columns). Finally, we had a tour of Lonnie's home which is filled with examples of his craftsmanship and which are the originals of things you have undoubtedly seen in books and magazines.

Lonnie Bird Reference List

Selected Books:

1. **The Complete Illustrated Guide to Using Woodworking Tools.** The Taunton Press, Newtown, CT., 2004.
2. **Period Furniture Details.** The Taunton Press, Newtown, CT., 2003.
3. **The Complete Illustrated Guide to Shaping Wood.** The Taunton Press, Newtown, CT., 2001.

Selected Magazine Articles:

1. **Traditional Joinery With Power Tools.** *Fine Woodworking Power Tool Techniques*, 48. (2005).
2. **Fundamentals of Layout.** *Popular Woodworking* 25(2), 76-79. (2005).
3. **Shape Wood with Rasps and Files.** *Fine Woodworking* (175), 62-65. (2005).
4. **Your First Hand Cut Dovetails.** *Popular Woodworking* 25(1), 60-65. (2005).
5. **Pennsylvania Tall Clock. Part One.** *Fine Woodworking* (171), 60-67. (2004).
6. **Pennsylvania Tall Clock. Part Two.** *Fine Woodworking* (172), 76-81. (2004).
7. **Block Plane Basics.** *Popular Woodworking* 24(5), 80-83. (2004).
8. **18th Century Pipe Box Provides Elegant Storage.** *Fine Woodworking* (173), 46-49. (2004).
9. **Frame and Panel Doors.** *Fine Woodworking* (168), 32-35. (2004).
10. **Carving a Period Shell.** *American Period Furniture* IV, 6-11. (2004).
11. **The Essential Shoulder Plane.** *Popular Woodworking* 23(6), 70-73. (2003).
12. **Choosing and Installing a Lockset.** *Fine Woodworking* (162), 80-85. (2003).
13. **Carve a Flame Finial.** *Fine Woodworking* (163), 104-108. (2003).
14. **Golden Formulas for Better Looking Furniture.** *Popular Woodworking* 23(7), 72-75. (2003).
15. **18th Century Pennsylvania Secretary.** *Fine Woodworking* (154), 50-55. (2002).
16. **Shaping Cabriole Legs.** *Fine Woodworking* (144), 44-49. (2000).
17. **Connecticut Tea Table.** *American Woodworker* 46-51(1995).
18. **Philadelphia Lowboy.** *American Woodworker* 46 (1994).



Picture 1. My spindle tools



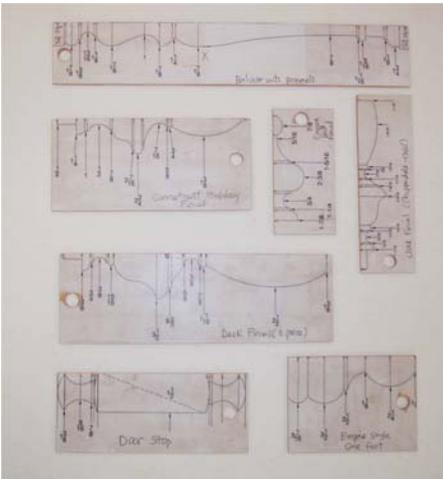
Pictures 2-4. Views of the Lonnie Bird School of Fine Woodworking



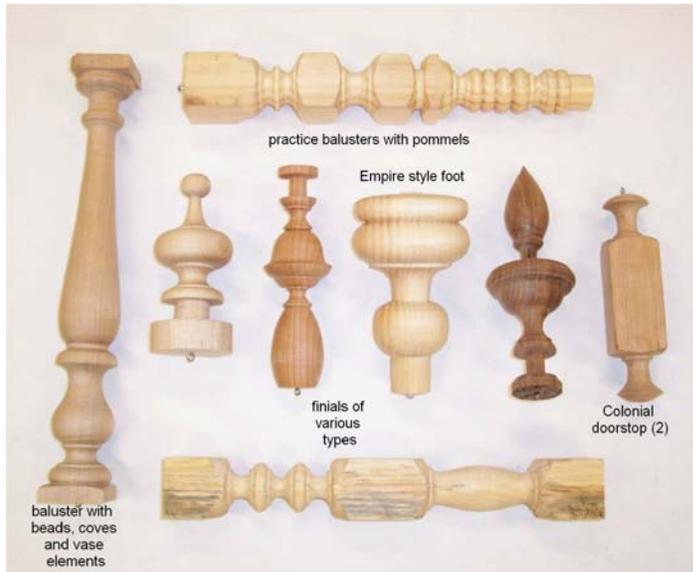
Pictures 5-8. Views of the benchroom



Picture 9. Examples of some of the beads and covers we turned as practice activities



Picture 10. Storey boards for projects



Picture 11. Some of our third-day projects



Picture 12. Example of a period clock with turned and carved finials, turned columns and other carving details.



Pictures 13-14. Class activities and group photo