

A Note From A Wood Tinker

This month the Wood Tinker returns to the Buckeye State, home to not only Chip Chats and the popular Dayton Artistry in Wood Show, but also to Warther Cutlery near Amish country. Warther makes high-quality knives for kitchen use and also knives for carving. A master carver, Ernest "Mooney" Warther, founded the business. (Mooney's grandson David Warther, Jr. has his own sailing ship carving museum which was the subject of an earlier Wood Tinker article).

Mooney Warther's knife making began when he could not find a knife that would hold its edge when carving dense materials such as ebony, ivory and walnut. Mooney worked in the local Dover steel mill and learned techniques for tempering steel. His carving knives held their edge so well that his mother asked him to make her a kitchen knife. In 1902, at age 17, Mooney presented his mother with his first handcrafted kitchen knife on Mother's Day. Now, over 115 years later, Warther Cutlery is a 4th generation, family run business.

Here is an example of a 1932 Mooney Warther design carving knife which is still made today.



Mooney was an acclaimed master carver whose carvings were exhibited across the United States. For decades Mooney and his brother conducted a road show that travelled to cities in 48 states including Wisconsin. His carvings typically were made from ebony, walnut and ivory.

Warther started as a whittler and a video recreates his early inspiration for carving sparked by a found jackknife. Throughout Mooney's life he would carve a small block of wood into a pair of working pliers and give them to children. Making only 10 cuts he would create a pair of pliers that pivot. Each was carved with no chips or scrap. See this done in a video by Mooney's son, David, Sr. on DailyMotion or Youtube.

[Warther Pliers DailyMotion](#)

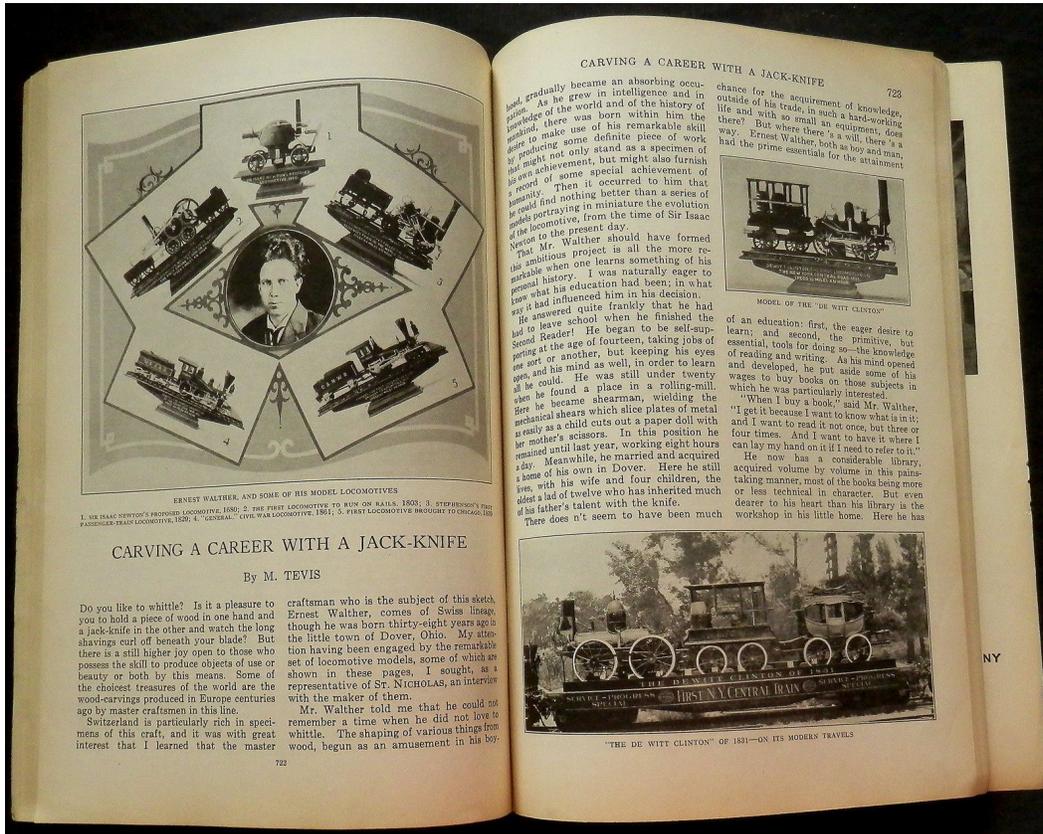
[Warther Pliers YouTube](#)

Like many great artists Mooney had an amazing ability to visualize and plan a carving project. An example of this is seen in his elaborate "Pliers Tree". First, Mooney made a 63 plier "tree" from a single block of wood without any chips. Then for Chicago's World's Fair in 1933 he made and exhibited a 511 pliers tree carved from a single block of wood, taking 31,000 cuts and two months to complete. Case University professors said an advanced mathematics degree would be needed to design a wood block of the correct shape to begin such a project. Self-taught Mooney said he was glad to be told this *after* he had made the tree and not before.

Shown below are Warther's 63 pliers "tree", and the "crown" of his 511 pliers tree.



In May 1924, 38 year old Mooney was becoming nationally known for his carvings when St. Nicholas magazine wrote "Carving A Career with a Jackknife."



This article was about "Ernest Walter"(sic) who left his job the previous year as a shearman in the Dover rolling mill to work full time as a professional woodcarver. The magazine's author was intrigued after seeing several of Warther's carvings depicting the history of the steam locomotive. That history was Mooney's lifelong project. By 1924, his steam engine carvings included Sir Isaac Newton's proposed locomotive in 1680, the first locomotive to run on rails in 1803, Stephenson's first passenger train locomotive in 1829, the famous Civil War locomotive "The General," the Dewitt Clinton of 1831, Lincoln Funeral train, and many more.

The ensuing years would see the addition of the monster locomotives through the heyday of steam, but no diesels for Mooney, he just did not find them appealing. In 1923, the New York Central Railroad promoted Mooney and his carvings with an exhibition on a six month long train tour. This was followed by a 2 1/2 year exhibition at Grand Central Station in New York City.

From 1905 to 1971 (from age 20 to 86) Warther created his amazing carvings. Today they are exhibited in The Warther Museum (which also has his original workshop). For more on master carver Ernest "Mooney" Warther, his history, life and work, visit: [The Internet Craftsmanship Museum's Warther Page.](#)



This museum has a tour guide and videos, animated carving of a steel rolling mill, the history of steam locomotives, a cutlery operation with sharpening available, a gift shop, arrowhead

collections, carved canes, plier trees, a photo collection from the travelling carving show, etc. In separate buildings on the museum grounds are a button collection, and the Warther home furnished as it was in the 1920s-1930s.



If in the Akron area, a day trip to Dover is well worthwhile. Plan to spend a few hours visiting Warther Cutlery, its museums and gift shop. Here are a few photos from our trip last fall:



Cutlery Operation (& the gift shop's round the corner!).



Watt's Steam Engine



One Leg of the Tour



Mrs. Warther had All Her Buttons!



Cane Carvings



Lincoln Tribute Carved Frame



The Warther Museum in Dover, Ohio is at 327 Karl Avenue, Dover, Ohio. You can visit them on the web at www.thewarthermuseum.com .

Also, Mooney's grandson David Warther, Jr. has his own carving museum in nearby Sugarcreek, Ohio dedicated to a history of the ocean sailing ships of western civilization. It too is worth a visit.