



PIONEER ART:

Scroll Saw

and

Inlay

By Alice Baker

The art mentioned in this article possibly cannot be dubbed pioneer, but it was made before the automobile absorbed the leisure of people, in the 1800's or at least in the first decade of the 1900's. Instead of the needle employed in much of women's artistry, it was made by man's instruments — the fine scroll saw, small hammer, and the miter.

A favorite feature of the early artificer was the wall bracket, or sconce. These small decorative shelves were usually made in pairs. The writer of this article inherited two such pairs which were made by her uncle, C. W. Jarvis who made them as a growing boy, but when time had lent worth and keen appreciation of their grace and beauty, she restored them to his daughter and granddaughter. (see above)

In-lay of wood required much skill and accuracy to produce an article of service and beauty. Albert and Charles Hunter, of Mukwonago were the makers of the table in the picture.

But the family most gifted in the art of in-lay was that of Matthew Rockteacher, grandfather of Leslie who is the present treasurer of Waukesha County. Matthew Rockteacher was apprenticed for four years to a cabinet maker in Germany. When he got to be of military age, he ran away from home to escape the draft and came to St. Francis, Wis. In Wisconsin he carried on his work of carpentry. He also transmitted his knowledge of cabinetry to his sons as shown by many articles treasured by his descendents.

His youngest son, Fred was the designer of a jewel box which was a decisive factor in his successful suit for the hand of his future wife. The walnut box is about four inches square, has a tray for various articles and is lined with blue velvet. The intrinsic claim to skilled workmanship lies in the parallel lines of bird's eye maple found on every side of the treasured keep-sake and a double set embedded in its cover.

An older brother Arthur, well-known carpenter, excelled in the art of in-lay and scroll-saw practice. He, too, labored for his Rachel, Nellie Way, probably not for seven years, but certainly, judging by the intricacies and beauty of this sewing box, a very long time. Made of black walnut, the 7" by 11" box was bordered an inch within the margins by a $\frac{3}{4}$ " band composed of alternate diagonal bird's-eye maple and walnut strips on the cover and sides. When the cover was lifted, one could see a marvelous joint, a long tongue projecting into a complementing groove, held sides together.

The box had a tray for different sewing accessories, buttons, snaps, etc. In the center of the tray was a hold the exact outline of a pair of scissors. Covering the scissors was a rectangular shield surmounted by a red velvet pin cushion. On the inside of the box-shaped pin-cushion was the inscription, "A. R. Dec. 25, 1882." But the most ornate feature of all were the initials, "N. W." scroll-sawed and intricate, cut from wood much whiter than maple.

The superlative artisan in the Rockteacher family, however, was Conrad, familiarly called "Coonie". For one of his nieces, Mrs. Arthur Stocks, deceased, North Prairie, he made a maple knife box and cut out a knife and fork in walnut for decoration on each of its two long sides.

His master piece, however, was the square table top made of five hundred pieces of various kinds of wood. A double-star is the general pattern. The center is a small eight-pointed star of rather dark wood. From this star are much longer rays extending almost to the edges of the table. One of these rays is much lighter in color than any of the others and extends almost to and is made to look as though it wraps around a cross piece of wood many tones darker than the enveloping ray. Most of the cross bars were made of cigar boxes which Coonie saved or solicited from many friends.

Fortunate, indeed, will be the persons who fall heir to these master-pieces of artisans' painstaking skills.



DIGGING POTATOES AT CORNFALFA FARMS, 1930. JAYSON SWARTZ DRIVES THE HORSES; MRS. PETER SWARTZ (IN DARK CLOTHES) AND LITTLE PETER LEWIS SWARTZ.

Picture loaned by Peter Swartz