

Fan-Carving *by Sally and David Nye*



Fan-carving is the process of slicing long-fibered wood and then fanning it to create a three-dimensional design. The most common shapes are birds and fans. To create this fan effect, all fan-carved items must have two basic cuts: the hinge and the interlock. The hinge cut is made so the blades can pivot, and the interlock cut is made so the blades can join and be held in place. These two cuts remain consistent among all fan carvers even though their carvings may differ.

In searching for the answer to the origin of fan-carving, our research took us to Europe. There we learned a deeper meaning to fan-carving than just making a delicate bird or fan; we found it is one of the oldest folk arts on the continent.

By working with European museums, we soon realized that fan-carving is almost a lost art. Archival documents from ethnographic departments were invaluable to us. They revealed that the fan bird has historical and cultural significance in most European countries.

Interestingly, all the information we found on fan-carving showed it to

have originated in Russia. Even the carvers we visited in Europe said they learned it from Russian soldiers. It must be emphasized that at one time, historically speaking, quite a lot of the European continent was Russia. Today's map of Russia is not the Russia of the past.

Our research revealed a legend that has come through the ages from ancient Russia. The legend says: *During medieval times, homes were single-room dwellings with one window and a stone fireplace. The entire family lived in this room. Winter months were quite dreary due to the lack of sunlight, and families were pretty much snowbound. The man of the house would make baskets, whittle wooden utensils, and tend to general repairs. In one particular home, there was a young lad who was quite ill and confined to his bed. His father made a bird to give his son some encouragement. Birds meant spring was soon to arrive. The little fan bird was hung from the ceiling near the fireplace so the child could see it from his bed. The warm air currents from the fireplace caused the little bird to spin and flap its wings and assume magical powers. It became known as a symbol of the Holy Spirit, safekeeper of children*



Sally and David Nye

Sally and David Nye enjoy books, history, and research. So when a fan bird crossed their path, it was natural for them to want to know more. They took up the chase, and their story is like a continuing saga. The more they learned about fan-carving, the deeper it drew them in. It led them to another continent, across mountain ranges, and, truly, through Europe's back door. Because fan-carving is an Old World folk art that is almost lost, information is scarce. The Nyes continue to search for new leads to pursue. It is their passion to preserve the symbolic history of the fan bird.

Their first book, *FAN-CARVING*, is \$19.95 plus \$4.00 S&H (USA & Canada). It contains:



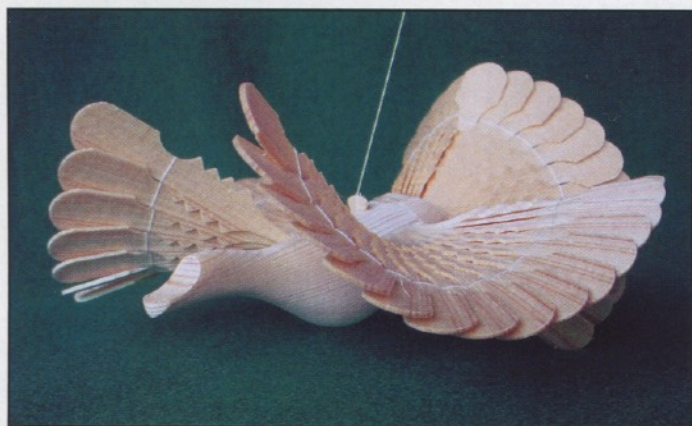
- ♦ 72 pages in full color
- ♦ legends and customs
- ♦ a guide to wood selection
- ♦ step-by-step instructions
- ♦ full-scale templates of five birds

The book, wood, and tools can be ordered from Sally and David at:

Fan Carver's World
2160 66th St. ♦ Fennville, MI 49408 ♦ Phone: 269-543-4755
sally@fancarversworld.com
www.Fancarversworld.com
Check, MO, MasterCard, Visa and PayPal accepted.

CARVING PROJECT (cont.)

and symbol of family happiness. The bird filled the boy with joy, and he soon regained his health. When neighboring villages heard about the bird, many asked the father to make one for their homes to safeguard and protect their families. Thus began the custom of hanging a fan bird in the home.



Through the years the fan bird migrated westward from Russia along three different paths. The southernmost path went from Romania to France. The middle path was through Poland to Germany. The northern path went through Finland and the Scandinavian countries and moved on to North America by way of the lumberjacks from those regions. The legends and customs associated with the fan bird were similar in all of these countries. It was essentially considered the "dove of peace," a symbol to protect the family and bring health and happiness to the home.

In Sweden, it was customary at Christmas to hang the bird over the table where the family gathered to eat. Originally it was a religious act. It symbolized the Holy Ghost, as did the "Pulpit Bird" that was common in most Swedish churches in the 17th century. The dove was hung under the pulpit canopy over the minister's head. The "Pelican," another fan bird, stood by the christening fount. It symbolized all-sacrificing love and redemption. Sweden issued postage stamps in 1981 commemorating these birds. The red stamp below is the Pelican, and the green stamp is the Pulpit Bird.



Many families in Germany, as well as other European countries, had private altars of worship in their homes. It was customary to hang the bird over these altars.

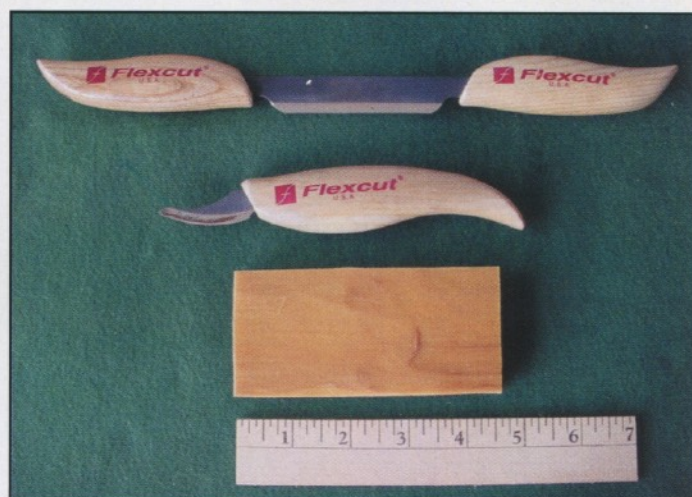


In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, people hang the fan birds over babies' cribs to promote good health. They also give them as wedding gifts to protect the home. Even though fan bird customs vary slightly, the symbolism remains meaningful throughout Europe.

Today, fan-carving is almost a lost art. There are still pockets of fan carvers in Europe and North America, but they are few in number. It is our hope to preserve fan-carving and the legends and customs associated with it.

Now that we have reviewed some of the fan bird's history, let us show you how to make a dove. Some wood requirements are essential. You will need a straight-grained and long-fibered piece of wood. We prefer white cedar. The wood should be fresh or green. We usually boil it to ensure that the moisture content is adequate. The wood must be wet so the feathers will turn without breaking off. The dimensions of our dove blank are 2" x 1/2" x 4-1/2". We chose a blank that is half sapwood and half heartwood to give the bird a nice bicolored effect.

Our favorite knives are the Flexcut Pelican and the 3" drawknife. For safety, we recommend wearing a protective glove and a thumb guard.





Step 1: Trim all sides of the blank so they are straight.



Step 4: Round out a 1/2"-wide cut across the 2" portion. Do this on both sides but only go about 1/3 deep. In other words, cut away 1/3 from each side, leaving 1/3 for the center.



Step 2: Trim one end so it is rounded. This will be the feather end of the blank, and the rounded area will be the feather tips.



Step 5: Measure 2-1/2" from the rounded end on one edge and 2-1/4" on the opposite edge. Draw a diagonal line connecting those points. This will be the hinge cut where the feathers will turn so they can interlock with each other.



Step 3: Measure 1" from the rounded end and draw a line across the 2" dimension. This will be the interlock cut where the feathers "interlock" and are held in place.



Step 6a: Make a V-cut along the line on both sides of the blank. The cuts must line up on both sides. The cut you are making will be a long taper as well as a diagonal across the 2" side of the blank.

CARVING PROJECT (cont.)



Step 6b: Cut equal portions from each side so that you leave a center of 1/8".



When you determine the desired feather width, stand the knife straight up and then just push down. It is most important that you let your knife follow the long fiber of the wood and not try to control it. Make sure your knife is straight and not cutting at an angle or you will cut across the fibers. You will know when you are cutting accurately because you will "feel" the knife work with the wood fiber. It is like splitting the fibers. The hinge will serve as the stop cut. Do not go beyond the narrow 1/8" cut.

Note: The first feathers along the 2-1/2" side will be sacrificial feathers. This area is at the back of the bird's head. These feathers will be cut off so the bird can have a nicely shaped head. Because of this, it is a good place to get the feel of the knife working with the fibers. Do not be concerned with losing an occasional feather. The other feathers will compensate for it. However, if several come off in a row, they can create a gap.



Step 7a: Now slice the feathers. We prefer to place the blank in a vise and slice the feathers with the Flexcut 3" drawknife. Place the blank in the vise with the rounded end up and the 2 -1/4" length closest to you. The narrow 1/2" dimension of the blank will be facing you.

Step 8: Now that the slicing process is complete, trim the interlock to make it narrower. This helps the feathers to nestle together more tightly. It also allows room for more feathers to be placed into the wings. This step is not done before the feathers are sliced because a thin interlock could become wobbly under the knife's pressure.



Step 7b: The drawknife will be held with the flat side toward you and the beveled edge on the other side. You will not be able to see the cutting edge. To determine the thickness of the feather, tilt the drawknife so you can see the cutting edge.





Step 9: Also, trim the hinge to make it narrower. It should now be about 1/16". The extra width was necessary during the slicing process to maintain structural integrity of the profile.



Step 12: Carve out the bird's body. As you shape the bird's head, the sacrificial feathers that we talked about earlier will be cut off.



Step 10: Trim the V-cut on the remaining portion of the blank so that the bird's wings and body will blend together more aesthetically.



Step 13: Flex the feathers to loosen the fibers. Do not be afraid if they snap and crackle. They will not fall off. In fact, if you want to take one out, you will probably have to snip it out with scissors.



Step 11: Draw the dove onto the blank.



Step 14a: Fan the feathers and interlock them to make three fans: two wings and a tail. With the bird facing you, take the first feather and turn it to the left side of the bird's head.

CARVING PROJECT (cont.)



Step 14b: Turn the second feather to the right side of the bird's head.



Step 15a: To form the tail, begin with the last feather. Let that serve as the anchor feather.



Step 14c: Turn the third feather to the left and "interlock" it with the first feather.



Step 15b: Pull the next feather to the left of the anchor feather and interlock it.



Step 14d: Continue to build the wings by interlocking every other feather. As you do this, pull the feathers alongside the head. This will allow room for the next feather to turn and interlock. Be sure to save an uneven number (five, seven, or more) of feathers for the tail. You can see the formation of the two wings.



Step 15c: Pull the next feather to the right of the anchor and interlock it. Continue interlocking the feathers back and forth to complete the tail.



Step 15d: You may have a few feathers between the wings and the tail. Interlock the remaining feathers into either wing or the tail until you have a balanced appearance.



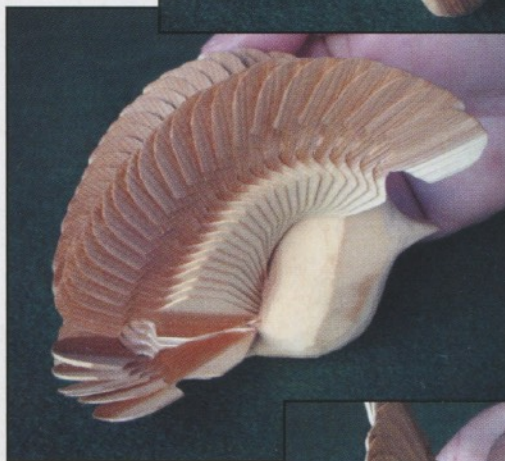
Step 16: To hang up your bird, create a hook from 20-gauge wire using needle nose pliers. Place a thread through the wire eye and tie it so it will form a loop. It is easy to insert the wire into the bird's body while it is still wet. Try to hide it among the wing feathers just behind the head.



Step 17: To give your dove character and personality, shape the wings by pulling them up along the head. Do not be afraid of the feathers falling off. Also, position the tail so it is centered between the wings.

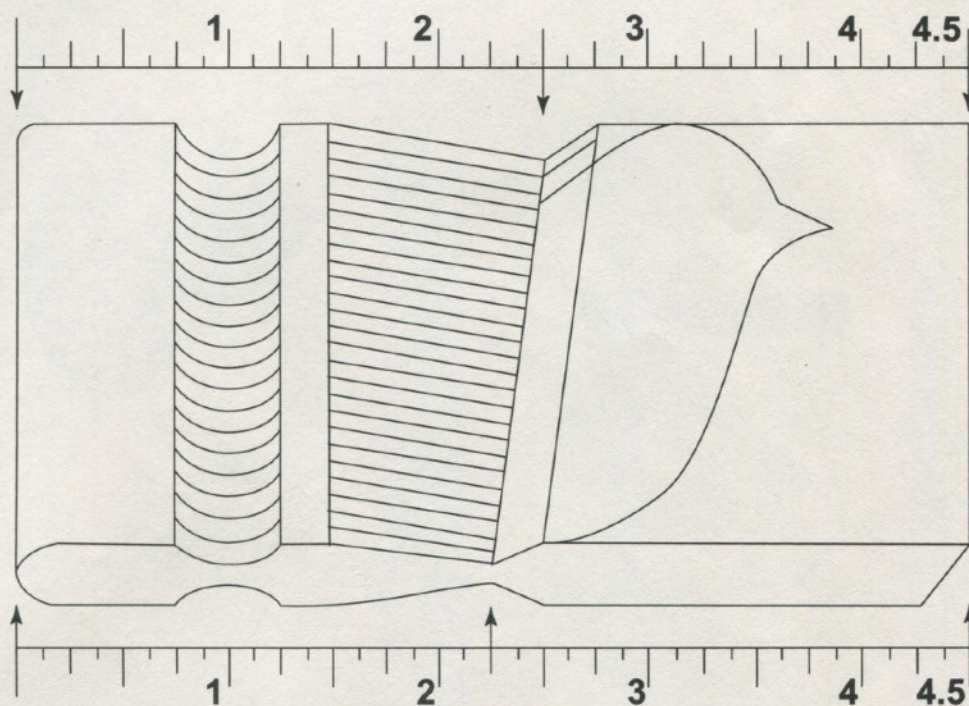


Step 18: After the bird has dried for two days or so, spray it with a preservative such as Deft or polyurethane.



May the Dove of Peace protect your family and bring health and happiness to your home.

Sally and David Nye



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