

# The CNEW Skew

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## President's Message

Are YOU having Fun? With all of the talent and varied personalities in our club you should be enjoying time with us. If you aren't then obviously something is broken. To help explain my thoughts this month and where the club might be headed, I'll relate the experience of being a member – as someone who is on a journey, perhaps on a ride in the "CNEW Bus".

Right now, I've been in the driver's seat for a couple of months and have been asking "Where is it that we wish to go as a group?" I think I'm getting some good ideas. The course we are on has three stops which we can visit as we need. Perhaps I'll call them Learning, Socializing and Praise. Each of us visits these places often whether we know it or not. Many of us like one place better or feel more comfortable there than in the others. Sometimes we're there to get information or help, sometimes we're there to work. It is my hope that each of us spends a little time in each of these places and can carry away a little more than they arrived with. The club after all is the powerful vehicle which lends itself to learning by demo's, hearing of instruction or sessions first hand and listening to why a fellow member's task went awry. We get to tell our friends what cool thing we did or how nice their piece is while someone we may not know is looking over our shoulder from the seat behind. Remember your buddy, the one you didn't even know one day far in the past? Surprise yourself at the next gathering and turn around fast while talking to a member you've known a while, you'll likely see someone interesting you haven't met yet. Maybe start off by saying "Hi, where you goin'?" They could be another best friend in the making. They may have secrets you need or know the route to where you want to go. Even then, if they are so green they don't even know how to spell L-A-T-H-E then you're sure to get praise from them on how wonderful your stuff looks, how skilled you must be, how much you know and... can you tell me more?

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## Editorial

### Turning Functional Lace Bobbins

I did not open my shop to visitors this year (there's no parking, no room and almost no heat) so here's a corner of it – the grinder stand. December's newsletter had an article by Peter Teubel on the subject of sharpening, which emphasised how much easier it is to sharpen using a jig. I use jigs but most of mine are home-made. The first photo of the grinder stand shows an overall view. Mine is rather deeper than most grinder stands: this allows me to pull the grinder forward for sharpening bowl gouges, which need clearance to swing from side to side. It slides back for roughing gouges and skewers. Taking full advantage of the space underneath, I have a vertical slide-out rack holding a dozen turning tools, metal drawers for small items and a couple of shelves for chucks, specialty tool rests and two angle grinders. There is also pegboard on one side for more tools.

The second photo shows the grinding setup in more detail. There's a Veritas tool rest on the left wheel for scrapers, a Wolverine-style gouge jig on the right

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## Club Officers and Contact Info for 2006

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|--|----------------------------|
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## Minutes of March Meeting

**Tim Elliott**

Membership dues for 2006 are now (over) due. The cost is \$20 per year. If you have not already paid, please see treasurer Mickey Goodman at a meeting or renew via [www.cnew.org](http://www.cnew.org).

February was our annual “shop-visit” month. All shop hosts had visitors except for Joe Harbey. Joe attended John McAtee’s open shop instead.

Treasurer’s report: Our bank balance is currently \$1746. We have 8 new members so far this year. 44 members have paid dues, 44 still not yet paid up for 2006.

Internal VP Frank White has been lining up programs for upcoming meetings. Tentatively, we will have Al Czellecz next month, Rick Angus in June and Ray Boutotte in July.

On **May 11**, Frank may be able to schedule an evening demo with **Alan Lacer** (who will be traveling in support of the NH symposium). Our cost is expected to be \$375 – we voted that Frank should proceed as long as our total costs do not exceed \$500. Many details are yet to be worked out including demo location (probably at the Craft Center), cost to members to attend (\$20?), and whether we can accommodate AAW members from other chapters (space permitting). Frank will announce firmer plans at the next meeting.

External VP Reid Gilmore had registration fliers for the NH symposium in Derry on May 13 (also available on the web – follow the link on [www.cnew.org](http://www.cnew.org)). Apparently they are not waiting for April to accept these.

Several members demonstrated at the Woodworks

show at the big E last month. These demos attract some attention, and we may have recruited some new members but we need to print more CNEW brochures. Next year, we may want to request more floor space. There are some event photos on [www.cnew.org](http://www.cnew.org).

Angelo Iafrate is organizing a Northeast Regional Symposium. Norm Mancuso and Frank White volunteered to act as the initial CNEW liaisons.

Dave Eaton gave out some certificates in appreciation of members volunteering their time to host open shops or get other CNEW business done behind the scenes. Recipients were: Reid Gilmore, Clive Hamilton, Joe Harbey, John McAtee, Ray Boutotte, Phil Bowman, Norm Mancuso and Dave Eaton.

The ART club has some events coming up that might be of interest. **Michael Hosaluk** will demo on June 3 & 4, **Betty Scarpino** in September. More info will be linked from [www.cnew.org](http://www.cnew.org).

Mickey Goodman expects to have a membership list for us to review next month. CNEW is occasionally asked to provide contact info for outside events (such

## April Program

The next meeting will be on Thursday April 6th beginning at 6:30pm, at the usual place. The demonstration will be on surface decoration, presented by Al Czellecz. Note that this is tentative – see the web site for latest information. Show & Tell will follow the regular business meeting so bring some of your recent work. The Wood Swap will also hopefully take place following the demonstration

as the NH symposium). We make an effort to ensure that this will not result in unwanted further distribution but please let Mickey know if you would like CNEW to keep your contact info private.

Ray Boutotte has refreshed the CNEW logo, creating an electronic version suitable for use on the web or for desktop publishing.

Dave Eaton is making a list of those interested in pooling rides (chartering a bus?) to the AAW symposium in Louisville KY. Please contact him if you would like to consider this.

CNEW will be printing 2006 membership cards soon. Showing one will give you a discount at some area stores.

Dave Eaton gave an update on the reorganized www.cnew.org website, but the best way to find out about this is to visit it and have a look around. We also have a Yahoo e-mail list. Joining (from the website) is the best way to stay current between meetings. To date, we have not had any problems with spam. In the event of snow on a meeting night we will post a notice to www.cnew.org by 4 or 5 PM.

Mickey Goodman recently took a private class with CNEW member Ken Dubay. He reports that he found it helpful and worth the \$200/day cost.

There was some discussion of the wood swap. Sometimes we have too little wood, sometimes too much. Nobody volunteered to work on leveling the volume, so it looks like it's going to continue to be erratic.

Project Goodwill: As planned, Charlie Croteau brought a load of wood to the meeting. Members who took some are expected to bring back a finished piece or two suitable for auction. Proceeds will be donated to an organization that provides wheelchairs to people who need them. This organization gets wheelchairs at a cost of \$41 each, so there is potential to raise enough money to buy ten or more. Please return your finished pieces at a future CNEW meeting.

Want to be the first to donate a finished item to Project Goodwill? George Whippen has beat us all to the punch. He donated a tall peppermill this month.

Steve Reznek announced that Lexington Arts & Crafts is having a show through March 16. They are located at 130 Waltham Street in Lexington and show admission is free.

### President's Message, ctd.

What destination are you aiming for? What are the things that make you happy when you think "I am a CNEW member" or turn on your lathe for the first time after a meeting? My map for this woodturning trip goes to somewhere over the hill where I cannot see. I believe there is a good deal of learning and laughter at the stops along the way. Let the club bring you along but please be sure to look out the windows and "see the things" along the way too. We have no seatbelts as everything is safe and if something breaks or we get a flat then we'll just fix it. Smoking is allowed and in fact encouraged, it's a good sign that you are thinking. Let's keep the vehicle clean and polished, perhaps we'll get a newer look if we want, but either way we'll surely continue to ride around in it proudly and know we are the envy of others. Let me not forget that we have regularly scheduled entertainment for your enjoyment as well. We call these meetings. Please hop on the ride and come to them, but don't sleep during the journey. Woodturning is fun and there are a lot of seats available on our trip. One of them is certain to make you feel very comfortable. Let me know if we hit a bump, if you need a pillow or anything else. The officers and I are here to make sure the ride is smooth and that YOU enjoy the voyage. It's really easy to turn the wheel to change direction a bit to stay on-course whenever we need. Just tell the driver...



Charlie with a load of "Goodwill" wood

## Presentation on Burls

Frank White

The first part of my presentation was something of a history lesson on the use of burls in America, much of which was drawn from my many years of experience at Old Sturbridge Village. In addition to its more familiar public face OSV has very extensive behind-the-scenes collections, among which is probably the largest collection of early woodenware held by a public institution in this country. This collection consists of several hundred bowls, dishes, plates, trays, and other turned or carved wooden vessels and implements. Among these are a large number of burl pieces ranging from Native American hand carved bowls and trays to lathe-turned bowls and covered containers. It was my privilege to have an opportunity to spend considerable time researching this woodenware collection in preparation for an exhibition on Native Americans.

Indians of the Eastern Woodlands (which roughly covers an area from Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio east to the Atlantic coast and includes the parallel forested areas of Canada as well) had a long tradition of carving wooden bowls and trays. A "tray" in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> vocabulary was a large oblong or rectangular wooden vessel with or without handles that was used for food preparation and serving and for communal eating. Before contact with Anglo-Europeans the Indians hollowed these vessels with stone tools and fire and then scraped them smooth with stone scrapers and beaver teeth. After contact with Anglo-Europeans they soon began to carve their woodenware with iron and steel axes, gouges, hollowing adzes and the like.

Although they made bowls from straight grained chunks of wood, Indians also often used burls. There are burl bowls of Indian manufacture that probably date as early as the 1600s, and there are occasional written references by contemporary English settlers to bowls made from "knots" by Indians. "Knot" was the early term for a burl. "Indian dishes" are occasionally found in household inventories of the early 1700s, and "knot bowls" are listed separately from plain wooden bowls and dishes on inventories from the early 1700s to the early 1800s. In addition to wooden bowls and dishes for everyday use Indians made specially carved and decorated bowls for ceremonial purposes. Many of these were "effigy" bowls with carved heads or representations of animals on the rim.

Although English settlers were skilled at turning and carving wooden vessels, they did not have a tradition of using burls for this purpose. It is commonly thought that Native Americans in the northeastern part of North America taught Anglo-European settlers to use burls to make their bowls and other household containers. We know from entries in a diary kept by a Bedford NH farmer that he and some of his neighbors were making bowls from knots as early as the 1750s. Thus, the so-called knot bowls and dishes in the inventory entries referred to above could have been made by either Indian or English craftsmen.

Although one can find examples of early bowls and trays made from a variety of burls, by far the most common are those made from ash burls. It is my opinion that they were made from black ash rather than white ash burls. About 1800, French naturalist Andre Michaux observed in his extensive publication on trees in North America that black ash trees were "more liable than any other species to be disfigured with knobs" and that these knobs or "excrescences" were used to make bowls. I think that not only were they abundant in the northeastern part of this country, but black ash burls were probably also more sound than those of other species. By far the largest number of burl bowls in public and private collections and those for sale in the antiques market are made from ash burls. This is equally true of the many burl examples in the OSV collection. These include carved and turned bowls of Indian and English manufacture. Several of the outstanding burl bowls in the OSV collection along with a large number of large number of burl items from other collections are featured in S. Scott Powers recent publication, *North American Burl Treen: Colonial & Native American*. This is the only published reference work on the history of the use of burls in North America. If you are interested in seeing other burl items, go to Scott Powers' website: [burlsnuff.com](http://burlsnuff.com).

The balance of my presentation focused on a variety of burls that I brought to the meeting. I have used burls for many of my turnings for about 15 years. A burl is caused by some kind of trauma affecting the tree and the resulting effort by the tree to heal over this trauma. Most commonly the trauma is in the form of a fungus. Almost every species of tree is capable of producing burls, but some species are more prone to producing them than others. In our area black cherry trees are the most likely to have burls. You will often see stands of

cherry trees that are affected with burls. In northern New England the same phenomenon is true of spruce (I think yellow spruce) trees, only there a single tree can be peppered with burls on the trunk and on the branches. However, one will also see find burls on maple, oak, birch, pine, walnut, and other kinds of trees.

Because of their abnormal growth pattern burls display very dramatic figure and color variations. The figure variants are usually manifested by swirled grain and in some species with clustered pin knots, especially in cherry, ash, oak, and sometimes maple burls. Birch burls often have an iridescent appearance produced by abrupt changes in the direction of the grain. It is common to find both dark and light wood, heartwood and sapwood intermingled in the burl. In The abnormal cell growth in the burl offers woodturners not only the benefit of great beauty in the wood, but also the advantage of not having to deal with end grain. Thus, one can usually sand and finish a burl turning more easily than a piece made from a normal cut of wood. Another advantage is that the very dramatic appearance of the wood helps to disguise minor blemishes that may be left from the turning process.

Because they are the most prevalent, cherry burls are what I use most frequently. Cherry burls are unlikely to be sound throughout, but usually contain voids, bark inclusions, insect infestations, or pockets of amber. For this reason I have learned that it is almost never worthwhile to try to make a functional bowl out of them. Rather I tend to make natural edge, decorative bowls or dishes, which are further enhanced by voids, contrasting bark areas, and other irregularities. It is often necessary to consolidate a particularly fragile area with CA glue while turning.



It has been my experience that oak and maple burls also often contain voids and bark inclusions, although some of the maple burls that I have used were sound. The problem is that you won't usually know until you have cut deeply into the burl, and then it may be too late to easily change your tactics. Also, contrary to my theory about the relative soundness of black ash burls, the only such burl that I have turned so far had a crease in its face that continued deep into the center. The result was that what I had planned as a functional bowl was nice to look at but not suitable for salad.

The shape of a rough burl sometimes dictates how to use it most efficiently. A burl that grows around the tree is a prime candidate for a spherical hollow form with the pith of the tree oriented on the vertical axis. Alternatively, the burl can be cut in half on the vertical axis and made into two or more bowls. If the burl protrudes from one side of the tree only, the obvious approach is to turn a bowl(s) from it. It is more problematic when you have a chunk of wood with multiple overlapping burls marching around it or a burl that is too big for your lathe. Then you have to decide how to cut up the burl to best advantage. One good piece

of advice that I got a number of years ago is that you should examine it carefully to see what is the best piece that you can potentially get out of this burl. Cut this out first and



then address what is left over. You are bound to cut away some of the other desirable parts of the burl so at the same time try to minimize the loss.

I also tend to cone out the center of most burls in order not to waste any more of it than necessary. The off-cuts

can be used to make small items or as accents on other pieces. Of course, the problem here is that I have pieces of burl that I am going to use some time all over the shop.

Other burls that I brought for the presentation were a redwood burl, a briarwood burl, and a manzanita root burl, none of which I have yet tried to turn. If you are interested in obtaining burls for turning, you can, of course, buy them from commercial wood suppliers, or you can get rough burls from loggers and foresters and tree surgeons. You may have to buy them from these sources as well, and here the problem is determining a fair price. Commercial suppliers usually sell processed burls by the pound, but I am reluctant to go that route with rough burls that may or may not be sound. What I have tried to do is to roughly calculate the size and number of pieces that I can get from a particular burl and what they should sell for. On this basis I make an offer. So basically, you are on your own!

### ASSORTED BURLS FROM SHOW & TELL



Clockwise from top left:

Frank White, maple

Frank White, carved cherry

Mickey Goodman, cherry

Graeme Young, willow

Graeme Young, a stupid thing to make  
with an oak burl

Joe Harbey, cherry.



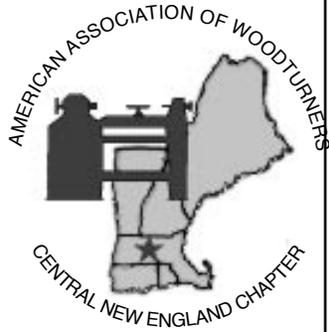


Top: Will Hunt, two by Tim Elliott, John McAtee.  
Centre: Rick Gonzalez, Dalton Lugg.  
Bottom: Phil Bowman, Beth Weiner.

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**Editorial, ctd.**

wheel. In the middle is a Veritas scraper burnisher and a stick-on rule for measuring gouge extension. There are various holes drilled in the top surface for holding other jigs, for skews and roughing gouges. The T-track plates under the grinding wheels came from a FastTrack toolrest which is only useful for regular woodworking blades like chisels and plane blades.