

PROPOSAL

FOR

THE FOUNDING OF A SCHOOL OF CREATIVE WOODWORK

AND

AFFILIATION WITH SELKIRK COLLEGE

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1. THE NEED

It is paradoxical that Canada, with its abundance of magnificent timber and its pioneer history of dependence upon forest materials, should now have so little to show in terms of woodcraft skills or appreciation for the careful and refined use of its timbers.

This sad reflection on our way of life since the end of pioneer days is manifest in a number of ways. For instance, the only evidence of sensitivity towards the use of wood is confined primarily to Canadian ethnic groups such as the west coast Indians and the French Canadian carvers. Immigrants may bring their skills with them but, so often, their talents are abandoned in the commercial race for volume and profit. At best, their skills die with them. Admittedly some architects make excellent use of our timber, but many have little profitable opportunity to do so and are generally frustrated. The commercial approach to the use of wood is largely fake and callous, and is manifest in low common denominator design and plastic imitation. As a result the public's natural sense of beauty and honesty towards the craft is distorted and bad taste is the keynote.

Added to this general apathy is the average Canadian handyman's attitude. He appears to believe he is quite competent in the use of wood and all he needs to know is how to cut up appropriate lengths of material and knock them together. This "easy to make a box" attitude shows through his results; his cabinets and his houses are so often little better than crude boxes with some adornment and little imagination. Probably the ready abundance of cheap materials and the lack of knowledgeable instruction have led to his apparent carelessness.

The low level of Canadian woodcraft skills and an unfortunate lack of training facilities have gone hand in hand, one the product of the other. A search for training facilities reveals little beyond the scope of basic tradeschools and proper apprenticeships are virtually nonexistent nor

could really be considered practical. The hobbyist also has little professional guidance to which he may turn if he wishes to develop his skills fully, and the "Popular Mechanics" approach seems to be his destiny.

All the above portrays only the dismal side of the picture. Happily two important factors indicate brighter prospects. First, the past twenty years or so has shown a noticeable awakening of the public's aesthetic values; a greater leaning towards fine arts and a search for expression through increased participation in various crafts and hobbies. In the experience of the writer, when he first started creative woodworking twenty seven years ago there was very little demand for his work yet, during the last ten years, he has been increasingly inundated by demand. How many people are looking vainly for adequate craftsmen to construct a fine home or a special piece of furniture? This first factor indicates that the Canadian has latent talents and sensitive taste to match those evident in older cultures. A most important manifestation of this is the change in the active search for Canadian identity. Secondly, international shortages and much tighter economics are triggering Canadian instincts towards better use of available resources; the search for more economic transportation and the return to home gardening or the use of allotment plots to reduce living expenses illustrates this trend. In terms of woodcraft, more people are trying to make their own structures or fixtures albeit, too often, rather crudely and wastefully. First hand evidence of the improved attitude towards woodcraft is the increasing number of young people who seek out the writer for guidance to improve their woodworking skills.

The older cultures have achieved their own identities. Those with available forests, or with trade access to lumber, reflect their unique cultures in their woodproducts and living styles. Switzerland, Scandinavia and Britain are a few examples. Why not Canada? Much can be done. Why not now?

The following proposal is presented in answer.

2. THE PROPOSAL

a) Concept and Objectives

It is proposed to establish in the Kootenays a school of creative woodworking open to all. Entrants may be young or old, male or female, skilled or unskilled, rich or poor. The key enrolment qualifications will be; the desire to improve ability and the integrity to carry through.

The school will act as a catalyst for the improvement of vocational and avocational woodworking and will carefully nurture the individual talents and expressions of each person attending. Further, it will be policy to observe and interpret the needs and spirit of Canadian culture and instill this spirit into the works produced by students.

In order to achieve these objectives, the student will be encouraged to exercise all of his resourcefulness, bringing into play the use of his imagination, his design, his skill, his available materials and his equipment. He will be guided and aided by the instructor, but not directed. In other words, the student will not merely be making better articles from wood; he will be creating them. His products will be a reflection of himself and the environment.

Mobility will be an important aspect of the concept. When needed, the school will be taken to the place where the student can reach it without disruption to his normal livelihood. Mobility will make a more difficult operation but will ensure maximum effective use of the facility.

b) Conduct of Courses

A variety of courses will be available to cover the varying needs of different students. Because of the small size of the school it will be necessary to offer only one course at a time until demand and growth permit otherwise.

It is not proposed to adhere rigidly to hard and fast syllabi because too much rigidity would oppose the school's policy to provide maximum scope for individual creativity. Rather, flexibility will be the keynote. This will not mean the loss of standards or control; within given time limits the student will be required to gain specific essential knowledge and skill according to the requirements of the given course. Upon completion of a course a graduate will be able to approach an employer or an individual project with specific abilities.

The selection of courses will be quite varied in nature, though creativity will be common to all. For instance a student may well use the school as a means of carrying out his own projects, or it may well be that a group of students could be concentrated on the completion of a project for their own community. It is foreseeable that training may include self-reliance courses for the unemployed, providing them with skills to make them more employable or better able to make their own way. Where employment is not available, such training could at least enable them to repair or improve their own homes and furniture at minimal cost. Which ever way, their training would lift their self esteem.

As currently conceived, the range of courses to be offered would fall into the following main categories:

- i) Building Construction - amateur
- professional
- ii) Building Improvement and Renovation
- iii) Community Project Construction
- iv) Cabinetry and Furniture - basic
- advanced
- v) Woodcarving and Sculpture - basic
- advanced
- vi) Self Reliance

The scope of each course and the standards required are presented in Appendix .

c) Preparation

It is expected that the school will be capable of functioning at the start of the 1975/76 fiscal year, though unknown factors will affect the degree of completion. A Canada Council Explorations Grant has been requested to assist construction, while there is reason for optimism the results will not be known until December. Winter conditions during construction will also have bearing upon progress.

Provided the grant is approved in full or provided alternate means can be found, it is expected that the two main components of the shop will be complete. Outfitting of individual benches and hand tools will still be required, also it may not be possible to provide the collapsible inter-spacing section between the two main units. The latter deficiencies may be overcome if budgetary approval will permit prior completion in advance of payment. Grant approval would permit some training before spring.

Should no assistance be available, it is still expected that a viable unit will be in operation for April. The mobile structure is already complete less the fold-out section, and the static section is expected to be framed-in and enclosed by the new year. At that time present resources will be expended and the dictates of a livelihood would force the writer to devote more time to other activities.

d) Affiliation with Selkirk College

There are many reasons for this school to seek affiliation with Selkirk. Those reasons are both personal and practical. The proposer, despite a wide instructional background in subjects related to civil and military aviation, has not dealt with public educational authorities and needs experienced guidance in the formulation and operation of this school. From the outset Selkirk has shown a most open minded and encouraging attitude towards the concept of such a school and the atmosphere and amenities of Selkirk appear most conducive for the purpose. Selkirk presents a pool of minds and resources from which to draw information

on administration, business accounting, art inspiration, technical know-how in allied fields and, generally, Selkirk conveys a quite unique sense of cooperation and goodwill. Affiliation with Selkirk would also convey a known standard. Alone it would be a mammoth task to administer, research, provide and teach this new concept. Probably all matters would receive attention but none properly. Pooling of resources would reduce overall administration, increase efficiency and allow the writer to focus on the prime objective of nurturing Canadian woodcraft talent.

Apart from the physical amenities and favourable nature of the College, the location has considerable influence on the chosen course of action. Selkirk is situated at a mellowing distance from the temporary slick and fashionable trends of the larger cities with their tendencies to become more and more alike.

Here there are still traces of origin which may provide the essential clues to detect the mainstream of Canadian identity. Further, the beautiful environment can only help to unfetter human creative instincts.

Thus there are many advantages for the school, should affiliation take place. Conversely, it would seem that Selkirk College would have much to gain. A mobile Selkirk School of Creative Woodworking would be an ambassador at large carrying the name into a wider span of communities. Any good potential of the school would reflect on the College itself, and the concept of searching out and developing Canadian skill and character in a hitherto lost art must be close to the philosophy of the College. Finally, here is a virtually ready made school on offer, prepared to pioneer in a visionary field.

3. SCHOOL FACILITIES

a) The Building

The school will be housed in a single mobile classroom/workshop similar to portable classroom units used throughout the Province. Certain modifications of the structure will be incorporated to permit expansion and provide increased mobility. (See diagram, Appendix _____)

The full classroom will consist of two main components, only one of which will be fully mobile. The mobile section is already constructed and, when complete, will include a full length side extension which can be folded into the existing unit to permit ready transportation. This unit is ten feet wide, the maximum width for towing without a pilot car, and encloses a length of thirty-six feet. The second main section will be portable but will remain static on a temporary foundation until such time when the whole school may be moved. This section will be linked to the other section with the folding span intervening.

The above configurations will house 12 students at home base or 6 students at a mobile site. Further expansion of the home base configuration is practical but may necessitate the use of intervening posts to support the snow load on such a wide span.

b) Equipment

Simple, basic equipment will be provided. The choice of power tools and hand tools is predicated by the allied needs of economy and of the school's objectives. Economy limits the availability of power tools to those already owned by the school. These are generally lightweight for both portability of the school and flexibility of shop lay-out for different uses. School objectives will also stress the use of hand tools and the resourceful use of all equipment and materials. The age of abundant waste is over.

Other equipment will include individual benches, a chalk board and stacking chairs. Space and safety considerations will not permit the use of spray finishing equipment, only low-volatile hand finish equipment is considered. Dust disposal systems must wait for finance to become available. Appendix _____ details proposed equipment.

c) Location

The site for construction and assembly is on the writer's property, two miles east of South Slocan and half a mile from the main highway. A site and access have been bulldozed. Existing buildings have been repaired to make storage available for materials and overflow equipment.

Whether or not this site can become permanent is a delicate matter; land freezes and zoning laws at present inhibit the construction of permanent buildings, and mobile buildings are subject to debate. This matter can best be determined when the writer is more familiar with the local authorities. In finality, the choice of a permanent site should be left open for mutual determination with Selkirk College.

Local public authorities will be approached for temporary sites when the school is to become mobile. It is anticipated that school grounds, parks, or construction sites may be used according to the nature of the undertaking. It is possible that auxiliary power equipment may be needed on some sites. Workshop noise interference will be minimized by the heavy insular construction of the building.

4. EXPENDITURES AND REVENUES

a) Capital Outlay

Overall round figures are presented in the text, specific details are listed in Appendix ____.

The existing mobile unit, installed on site, has cost close to \$8,000 cash outlay. The value of existing power tools and materials housed is currently estimated at just over \$5,000. Estimated cash outlay for the completion of the static unit and collapsible sections is another \$8,000. The value of remaining equipment should amount to a further \$5,000.

In all, the completed cost of the whole structure is estimated at \$16,000 and the contents at \$10,000, for a total of \$26,000. These figures do not include subsistence and personal expenditures directly related to the project which are hoped to be offset, at least in part, by the Canada Council Grant. Neither do they take into account the interest on a \$10,000 loan invested in the project. Also, certain costs in the adaptation of the property have not yet been taken into account. (Goodwill or the value of the concept and capability??)

Thus the total capital value of the school is expected to be _____.

b) Operating Costs

Operating costs will include the normal overheads for the operation of the building and equipment, plus towing charges when needed. At the commencement of operation there will be one instructor who will require an equitable salary plus mobility expenses. Administrative costs will include some clerical and accountancy services, provision of reference material and certain consumable shop materials. See Appendix ____ for details.

c) Revenues

It is hoped to achieve status that will provide access to student grants and bursaries. But, whatever the means, student fees will be the main source of revenue. Other possible resources may include the publication of texts and manuals, available to students and the public at large and, also, the sale of articles to newspaper syndicates. Further possibilities are lectures to the public and the sale of school products.