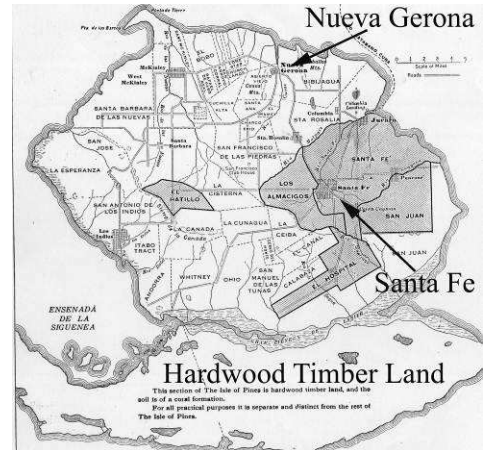


## Woodcraft Products Corporation

by Paul D. Bullock

Homer Bullock, my father, went to the Isle of Pines in November 1919 to help his older brother, Edgar, in managing the Pine Box Lumber Company in Nueva Gerona. Homer took his family, wife Mary and son Philip, and lived near the factory. For the first few years there he was busy with his responsibilities at the plant. During that time he became interested in wood turning and learned the skills from a local artisan.

The Bullocks left the Isle and came back to the states in the summer of 1924, but before they left they moved to Santa Fe in the fall of 1923 so that Homer could get into a business to make and sell wood turned products. In Phil's (*Phil was my older brother and was on the Isle with our parents at the time*) memoirs he says: "I have concluded that Homer would like to have stayed on the Island and was in no hurry to come home. Apparently he was no longer with the mill when we were at Santa Fe. Homer and Robert Warfield set up a small shop at Santa Fe where they made small fancy articles of native Isle of Pines hardwoods. They made such things as plates, candlesticks, letter openers, etc." The hardwoods came from the sparsely populated southern part of the Isle about 15 miles south and southwest of Santa Fe.



1910s Map of the Isle of Pines

Nueva Gerona to Santa Fe = 12 miles

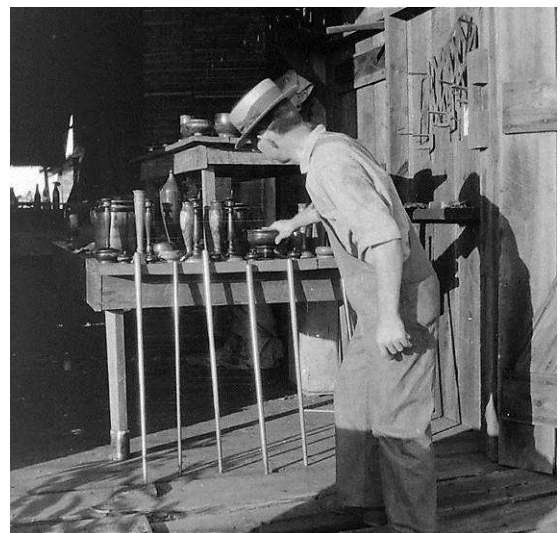
An article from the "Isle of Pines Appeal," dated December 1923 mentions this business: "RARE HARDWOODS OF ISLE MUCH ESTEEMED Beautifully Wrought Into Novelties That Find Ready Sale Among Tourists and in Havana

The rare woods on the island furnish excellent material for the manufacture of hard wood novelties, and the business has assumed quite considerable proportions since first introduced by the pioneer, Mr. W. J. Bagley, in the early days of Americanization. Mr. Bagley is still one of the leading producers. Displays are shown also from the shops of Edward C. Williams of Nueva Gerona and Messrs. Bullock and Warfield, of Santa Fe.

The novelties are, principally, napkin rings, vases, trays, other receptacles, and gavels, all turned and book blocks and display cross-sections.

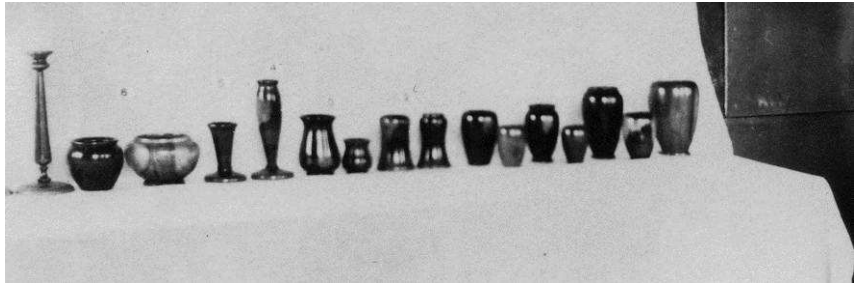
The city of Havana and the tourists take the most of the product and prices range from fifty cents for a napkin ring to ten dollars and up for some of the larger and more nearly perfect vases.

Granadilla is perhaps the most popular wood on account of its exquisite shadings from white through brown and darkest brown to a dead black. Next in favor comes acana, a red wood with a very distinct grain; also satin-wood, a member of the sandal-wood



Robert Warfield showing hand turned wood products for sale in Santa Fe

family, of a golden cream color with a rich flaky grain and the fragrance of true sandal-wood; majagua, a green wood with delicate and deeper shades; sabicu, or burr mahogany, lighter than mahogany and of finer grain; fiddle-wood, a yellowish brown wood with a delicately traced grain and shades of deeper colors;



**Hand turned novelties for sale at the Bullock and Warfield shop in Santa Fe**

sabina, a wood that resembles the pencil cedar and is very rare; and roble gallo, with the appearance of fine grained white oak but showing no flakes when quarter-sawed.

All these woods take an elegant polish. As yet there is no display of in-laid work or carving but an inspection of the turned product is a rare treat to the wood-lover.”

The Bullock family arrived in Penn Yan in the spring of 1924 and lived with Mary’s parents, SM and Minnie Rector, in Second Milo. From Phil’s memoirs: “Some samples of Homer’s tropical wood items had been brought to Penn Yan and came to the attention of Howard W. Swarthout, husband of Helen Egeria Rector (SM & Minnie’s # 2). Howard had been a NY State trooper and was in the investment business. Howard and Homer got together and agreed to go into business making novelties of Isle of Pines hardwoods. And so ‘The Woodcraft Products Corporation’ was born. Homer went back to the Isle of Pines in Nov 1924 to bring back a supply of tropical wood. He found it along the South Coast of the island. It came by schooner to Tampa, FL and then on to Penn Yan by rail.” Just how much he brought back is not known but it must have been tons since I remember at least a ton of logs in barns and garages at the homes we lived in East Bloomfield and Holcomb in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s.



**Hardwood log coming out of the forest in southern Isle of Pines**

Another excerpt from Phil’s memoirs: “A shop was built at Second Milo, between SM’s Garage and the Town of Milo sheds. I would estimate the building was perhaps 40 X 40 feet. The rear half was devoted to storage of the wood while the front was populated with the machinery. An International one cylinder gasoline engine was the power source. The engine was typical of its day with the horizontal water cooled cylinder and two large flywheels, approximately 3 feet in diameter at the sides. To start



**The SM Rector home in Second Milo in 1990. The Woodcraft factory was located to the right of the small garage to the right of the house.**

the engine, you would open a valve to relieve the compression, spin the flywheels, by means of a crank slipped over the shaft, close the valve and hope for the best. An overhead drive shaft carried power to the machines by means of the open flat belts. I recall 3 massive home built lathes, circular saw, jointer, band saw and others. I'm not certain but I think Homer was on hand when the Shop was built and populated with its machinery. In other words, I am not sure if the shop came first or the Cuba trip!"

Howard and Homer got press coverage for their new venture. Here is a small item from the Penn Yan Democrat on March 20, 1925: "A NEW FACTORY - A novelty factory operating under the name "Woodcraft Products Corporation" has located at Second Milo five miles south of Penn Yan, and will manufacture novelties such as vases, jardinières, lamp standards, from choice wood imported from the Isle of Pines. Homer Bullock, a Yates county man, the head of the undertaking has erected a small factory near his home in Second Milo, where the woodcraft products will be turned."

Another article in a Penn Yan Newspaper sometime in 1925: "NOVELTY FACTORY LOCATED HERE - Woodcraft Products Corp. Started at Second Milo to Turn Out Vases from Choice Tropical Woods - A novelty factory operating under the name 'Woodcraft Products Corporation' has located at Second Milo Park, five miles south of Penn Yan, and will manufacture novelties such as vases, jardinières, lamp standards, bases, etc., from choice wood imported from the Isle of Pines.

Homer Bullock, a Yates county man, is at the head of the undertaking; and has erected a small factory near his home in Second Milo, where the woodcraft products will be turned out.

Mr. Bullock spent his boyhood on the Isle of Pines and is familiar with the various kinds of wood grown there, in fact, he developed early in life a love for woodcraft and later learned the art of wood carving and turning. He works without model or pattern and shapes his work to agree with a preconceived image of the finished article which he has in his mind.

Last November, Mr. Bullock returned to the Isle of Pines to go over the source of the raw material he would need for his factory, and while there he gathered together the following varieties of wood to make up the first carload; yuma, acetilla, sabieu, cerillst, roble, jimnici, granadilla, and yaiti wood, all of which are foreign to this section. Even the Boy Scout troops failed to recognize any of them.

Many of these varieties are found only in the virgin forests where there are no roads, and they have to be cut into short lengths and carried out on the backs of the workmen. Some of the wood is very rare. Only the trained woodman can locate them. All of them are very heavy, the one carload weighing nearly forty tons. They are shipped by boat to the nearest point in Cuba where they are loaded on cars and shipped by rail and car ferry

through Havana to Key West, arriving in Penn Yan in the same car in which they were loaded at Cuba. All the woods used for this work are extremely hard as well as heavy so that special tools as well as



**Homer's wife, Mary, and daughter Ruth are looking at some of Homer's hand turned wood products in 1960. The dark and multi colored items were made from Isle of Pines hardwoods.**

special skill are required in turning them. They all have very beautiful coloring, two pieces from the same stick often showing different coloring and grain. The sticks are of small diameter, so each article is tuned from the heart of the wood where the grain is the finest and most beautiful. Such woods take a very high polish which brings out all the beauty of the grain.

This industry is in its infancy, in fact, this is the only factory in the United States turning novelties from those varieties of wood, and it is not expected that the growth will be rapid as each workman will have to be especially trained in the work. The manner of marketing the product has not been fully decided upon. A folder describing the articles and containing cuts of some of them, however, is now being prepared by Joseph P. Craugh.

Those who have seen sample articles, so far turned out, agree that there will be a ready market for all that can be produced, and no doubt the fact that a person could visit this factory and purchase an article they had seen turned from the rough wood and polished and which cannot be duplicated in color and grain, will be an additional reason for many tourists visiting this section of the Finger Lakes Region.”

Homer entered his wood turning wares for judging at the Yates County Fair in 1925. An article in the PENN YAN DEMOCRAT on SEPTEMBER 4, 1925 declares that Homer won both first and second premiums for all the categories in the Hand Turned Woods section.

“County Fair Premiums

Section 14 - Hand Turned Wood

Table Lamp - 1st, Homer Bullock; 2nd, Homer Bullock

Hand lamp - 1st, Homer Bullock; 2nd, Homer Bullock

Candlestick - 1st, Homer Bullock; 2nd, Homer Bullock

Vase - 1st, Homer Bullock; 2nd, Homer Bullock”

The corporation had a showing at a shoe store in Penn Yan. Here is an article in the GENEVA DAILY TIMES on SATURDAY, AUGUST 15, 1926:

“Display of Woodcraft is Shown Public

Penn Yan, Aug. 15 - At Williams' shoe store there is a partial showing of some of the numbers being turned out by the Woodcraft Products Corp., one of Penn Yan's new industries. While this new industry has been actually turning out finished products less than four months, already their work is receiving much comment from the trade which handles such a line.

Nearly everyone who has stopped and admired this beautiful line of vases, candlesticks, bowls, trays, lamps, etc., has commented on the colorings and the originality of shapes. The different shades of color found are due entirely to the different woods used, all of which are imported and are rare, even in their native haunts.

Mr. Homer Bullock, who is in full charge of the company's plant, has spent three months in Cuba and the Isle of Pines in selecting the different woods from which these articles are made. Mr. Bullock has had many years of experience in wood carving and is considered by those who are competent to judge, a very unusual artist in this calling. The different shapes are original designs of Mr. Bullock.”

It appears that the corporation was trying to market in New York City based on this item in the PENN YAN DEMOCRAT on FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 1927: “Homer Bullock was in New York last week in the interest of the Woodcraft Corporation. An entirely new line of novelties is being designed at their factory at this place.”

With the storm clouds gathering in late 1927, SM and Minnie Rector sell the portion of their property on which the factory was built to the Woodcraft Products Corporation according to this note in the GENEVA DAILY TIMES on MONDAY, OCTOBER 24, 1927: "Stephen M. Rector and wife to Woodcraft Products Corporated, premises in Milo, \$1.00." SM and Minnie were without a doubt aware of what was going to happen in a few short months and were separating their property from that of the corporation.

Sometime in early 1928, the Woodcraft Products Corporation filed papers to dissolve. Note this item in the GENEVA DAILY TIMES on SATURDAY, APRIL 28, 1928: "Woodcraft Firm Dissolves - Penn Yan, April 18 - A certificate of voluntary dissolution has just been filed with the Secretary of State by The Woodcraft Products Corporation of Penn Yan. The papers were filed with the State Department by Maurice W. McCann, Penn Yan."

Then came a Sherriff's sale as per this article in the PENN YAN DEMOCRAT on FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 1928:

"SHERIFF'S SALE - County of Yates, ss:

BY VIRTUE of an Execution issued out of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, to me directed and delivered, against the goods and chattels, lands and tenements of WOODCRAFT PRODUCTS CORPORATION I have seized and taken all the right, title and interest of said defendant in and to the following described property, to wit,:

ALL THAT TRACT, OR PARCEL OF LAND, situate in the Town of Milo, County of Yates and State of New York, beginning at a point in the center of the highway running west from Second Milo to Willow Grove in the Town of Milo, Yates County, New York, one hundred and forty (140) feet east from the point where the, north-east corner of the premises of Fred Cook intersects with the north-west corner of the premises of the Second Milo Cemetery; thence east along the center of said highway forty-six (46) feet to a point; thence south in a straight line sixty-six (66) feet to a point; thence west and parallel with the first mentioned line forty-six (46) feet to a point; thence north sixty-Ssix (66) feet to the place of beginning.

Together with a right of way across the premises of the first parties for the purpose of ingress and egress from the highway to the property hereby conveyed ta second party. Said right of way being over that portion of the premises of first parties, which is now used as an approach or drive, to the garage of first parties.

Said premises being part of the same premises deeded to Stephen Rector and wife by Joshua Case and wife, and said deed being recorded, in Yates County Clerk's office.

WHICH PROPERTY I SHALL OFFER FOR SALE, as the law directs, on the 10th day of February, 1928, at ten o'clock In the forenoon on said property in the Town of Milo, County of Yates. State of New York. Dated this 29th day of December, 1927.

MILTON L. RAPALEE.

Sheriff'

Homer accepted the job as manager of the Singer Sewing Machine store in Geneva in late 1927. Note this item from the Penn Yan Democrat in November 1927: "Homer Bullock is with the Singer Sewing Machine Co. at their Geneva store." The family moved to Waterloo and Homer made the daily commute to Geneva. He had that job until 1932 when the great depression hit that segment of the market. Homer is listed in the Geneva City Directory from 1929 through 1932 as follows: "Bullock, Homer (Mary) mgr Singer Sewing Machine Co res Waterloo." He was without a regular job until mid-1934 when W. E. Wemett hired him to be a wood turner at his Roadside Craftsmen in East Bloomfield.

Homer did end up with much of the Isle of Pines hard wood and at least one of the heavy lathes. He used the wood at the Roadside Craftsmen from the summer of 1934 until about 1942. He also ended up with some of the equipment. In his memoirs, Phil tells us: "At this site (*the Roadside Craftsmen*) were: a potter, a weaver, and a wood turner. Out in front of the building were the potter's wheel and the wood lathe where the tourists could watch the pottery and the wood turning take place before their eyes. This lathe was one of the three made for the shop at Second Milo 7 years before. But this time it was driven by an electric motor."

When Homer died in 1957, there was still a goodly amount of Isle of Pines hardwood logs stored on the second floor of the barn at the Bullock home in Holcomb. At that time, Phil took possession of the large lathe and some of the hardwood. He later tried turning some pieces to make a bowl or some other item but dry rot had made it impossible to work the wood. My guess is that the wood died with Homer.

When Phil was discharged from the U. S. Army in 1945, he and Homer teamed up to form "Bullock & Son" woodworking enterprise. Phil describes this in his memoirs: "I don't remember what Homer's situation was employment wise at the time (*Homer was working at a furniture factory in Rochester at the time.*), but one day he asked me to go into business with him, he painted a glowing picture of the opportunities that lie ahead in the woodworking field. I thought it over for a few days. My heart wasn't in it at all but I had a sense of obligation to him for my sponging off him all these years. And I felt sorry for Homer and Mary. Homer always reminded me of Willie Loman in 'The Death of a Salesman'. He just didn't have what it takes to work for himself and I have found that I don't either. Against my better judgment, I accepted. Later, I would rue the day."

"Out back of Homer's place was a small barn that we converted to a shop. We went to the city and



Homer turning an item on the large lathe in the outdoor gazebo in front of the Roadside Craftsmen in 1934 or 1935



Header for the Bullock & Son invoice

purchased several machine tools; we had 3-phase power installed etc. We had a nice little shop there. As time went on, things were rather strained between Homer and me. My savings were gone and profits were very scarce, I was back in my old rut.” In 1948, Phil left Bullock & Son and got into the electronics, radio and television fields at Stromberg-Carlson and Xerox and was quite successful.

I’m including Phil’s words here since they describe in a few simple sentences Homer’s lack of business acumen and salesmanship. Homer was a remarkably talented woodworker but that wasn’t enough to build a successful business.

Homer kept working at his business until he died in 1957.



**Homer and Mary spraying parts for towel racks in his shop in about 1948**