

Name of interviewer: Mathew Nickols

Name of interviewee: Betty Beaver

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Length of interview: 20:58

Location of interview: Cherokee County, NC

#### START OF INTERVIEW

**Mathew Nickols:** Hey [Mrs.] Beaver [inaudible] do you know your being taped?

**Betty Beaver:** Yes

**MN:** Okay. Is there a crafting tradition in your family?

**BB:** Yes

**MN:** If so, what crafting?

**BB:** Wood carving. And, oh goodness, it goes back, how many years? About at least 50 years.

**MN:** Oh wow.

**BB:** And, my husband's family did woodcarving. His grandma. He had two aunts. He had two uncles. His dad, and then him, and then me.

**MN:** So, it's very, a lot of tradition there.

**BB:** Yes.

**MN:** How important is your craft work to you, particularly carving? I know its important to a lot of people.

**BB:** Well, we carve and sell to the John C Campbell folk school. And we also go to craft shows. When I started carving I tried for about a year on my own and there was so many things that I couldn't do that I needed someone to show me how to do. So, I went over to the John C Campbell folk school and took the apprentice class for three years and I loved it. I have been carving ever since. And that's been nearly twenty years ago when I started.

**MN:** Oh wow, so you've got many years of experience huh?

**BB:** I also teach wood carving. And I carve at least every other day if not every day [laughs].

**MN:** Oh wow. Do you consider yourself to have a distinct style that you use? Or is there something that defines your type of carving?

**BB:** Every carver has their own style and you can pick your own carving out from [others]. If there was twenty pieces sitting there you could pick yours out just at a glance. What I do. Now there is three types of carving: [inaudible] carving relief carving, and "in the round". And I do "in the round" – That's a three-dimensional piece and that's the type that I do.

**MN:** So, is there a more traditional type of carving? Or is there a more conventional type?

**BB:** Well, what we carve for the folk school is mountain animals. That's the type that they want. But there is caricature carving and aquatic carving, and just different types you put in different categories. But what we mostly do is mountain animals. I do a lot of caricatures, but they don't sell like the animals.

**MN:** I guess it's [animal carving] just more popular here in the mountains?

**BB:** Yes

**MN:** My next question is: what do you know about western North Carolina tradition of your craft?

**BB:** Well that's about it. The way carving really got started around here and got so popular was this lady over at the John C Campbell folk school. Her name was; Was it Mary? [inaudible], Mrs. Campbell, the owner of the folk school. She would go down there to that little corner store down there in Bryce town and she would see those men on rainy days sitting there on that bench whittling. And she decided that if they would learn how to carve, that they could sell their carvings through the folk school. That's how it got so big right here in this area. She gave them a rainy-day job when they couldn't work in their fields and stuff. They could make more carving a week than they could working for other people on other people's farms. So, everybody just started carving instead of working in the fields.

**MN:** So, it's really popular in this area [carving]?

**BB:** Yes, there is a lot of carvers, but we are short of carvers and we need more.

**MN:** What was your influences in getting started? Which influenced your style and what you use?

**BB:** This may be something. What made me want to carve was my husband told his brother one day that I was "trying" to carve. I told him that I wanted to carve one of those little bitty rabbits. Well, I cut my finger and I told him "I'm not doing that" [carving]. His brother came out here and told his brother that "that lazy thing over there, she could carve if she would". I started carving just to show him I wasn't lazy. [laughter] That's how I got started but after I got started, I loved it and now I don't want to stop

**MN:** So, there is kind of like a carving community here, would you say?

**BB:** Yes.

**MN:** How does that affect the crafting in the area? do you think it encourages more people to carve?

**BB:** I don't know. Like I say, right now we are short of carvers and are needing some. A lot of people take classes, but don't want to do it as a second income. They just want to do it for their own pleasure.

**MN:** Does it ever take more than one person to complete a craft?

**BB:** No, it can. Two or three people could work together to do something, but it doesn't have to.

**MN:** You told me a little bit. But tell me more about the techniques that you use. You told me the three different kinds but are there different techniques that are distinct to your craft?

**BB:** Well, we've got all kinds of tools we use [inaudible] so far we haven't used any power carvers. But I am wanting a power carver. There are [inaudible] there are mallets and chisels there are power carvers. I mostly use my knife. That's how I started. I bought all of the tools the [palm gouges] but unless its for one specific thing like making the eyes or something like that I hardly ever use the [palm gouge].

**MN:** Does the [palm gouge], does that just take away bigger pieces of wood?

**BB:** Let me go and get you some of them [goes to get tools].

**BB:** Right here is the number two "u gouge" you've got to have that if your going to make faces. That makes this [shows model].

**MN:** Wow that's very detailed.

**BB:** This one right here is a miniature "v gouge" this makes hair, like for a beard.

**MN:** I can see that.

**BB:** I can't tell where the lines are with these glasses on. There!

**MN:** Oh yes, that's pretty!

**BB:** I've got this head shaped, then ill go in there and make hair on his head.

**MN:** Is this Jesus?

**BB:** No, this is the wise man, one of the wise men. This one [tool] you can use just like a knife to get under places that you can't get to with your knife. This [tool] is a miniature "u" you can use this for hair too, on animals, but I don't use it on people. This one [tool] is used to make a deep groove. I've got others but didn't bring them all out here. The v-tool and the number two "u" gouge is all I used to make that piece right there: it's a standing wise man.

**MN:** Thank you for showing me this. How far have you traveled with your crafts? You've told me that you've sold at many different places.

**BB:** I have been to lots of places. [laughs] I have been out to Arkansas, to Pennsylvania. Where else... Right now, I can't think of anything. We used to go down to [inaudible] creek a couple years and to the heritage festival in Cullowhee. We used to go over to Dollywood to their crafts show.

**MN:** Do they have a big thing over at Dollywood?

**BB:** They used to, I'm not sure if they still do or not. It was three days: Friday Saturday and Sunday. But the people that paid to get in, after they got in to the park they couldn't afford to buy crafts. So [laughter] you really didn't sell much. But it was fun, and it didn't really cost anything.

**MN:** I can tell that with the ticket prices being high you'd spend all your money. What kind of market do you aim for with stuff like this? Is it a lot of tourists that come through and buy stuff like this? Or is it a mix of that and local?

**BB:** You have to pick and choose. Because if you go to the one down at [inaudible] creek. It's not a [inaudible] show, it's not quality crafts, and people come in there expecting to buy little dollar items. I don't have dollar items. [laughter]

**MN:** Of course.

**BB:** To mix our wood carving in with stuff like that, you just don't sell anything. You have to go to a [inaudible] show that has quality crafts and people expect to pay a good price for things.

**MN:** About how many items do you think that you make in a year?

**BB:** Oh, my goodness [laughter]. Well, this week I've made two standing wise men, a honey bear, a walking bear, a squirrel, a baby pig, and a beagle dog. So, I have done seven items this week plus teach a class last night. [laughter].

**MN:** Your busy! About how many hours does it take to make something like a standing wise man?

**BB:** The [inaudible] figures for the nativity scene. It takes all day to make one figure at eight hours.

**MN:** Putting all of this time in, is it hard to part ways with the works that you make?

**BB:** Oh yes, I've got some pieces that I wouldn't get rid of at all.

**MN:** Describe some of your favorite pieces.

**BB:** My Moses is my favorite. Right now I'm doing some [inaudible] Santa's. They are jointed. Their elbows, shoulders, head, knees, and the hip move. I carve them and then I make the clothes for them. It would probably, I'd say, take about three days to do one of them.

**MN:** Do you do all of that out of one piece of wood?

**BB:** No, it has to be cut out and put together to get them to move.

**MN:** What kind of problems do you run into in wood carving?

**BB:** Knots! [laughs] knots in the wood and wormy wood. You don't want wormy wood. We lost a whole truck load of buckeye. We were letting it dry and it got wormy before it got dry. You hardly ever get a piece of wood without knots. Right now, we are having a problem with finding dry wood. We can get wood that's not dry but then you have to let it dry for about six months. We are about to run out, so we are really just using scraps right now until we've got some that is dry.

**MN:** You told me a little bit about the teaching that you do. How do you influence new generations to be involved, and how do you do that with the craft?

**BB:** There's not [many] ways to do that. My nephew was really interested in it. [and] They have this project that they have to do before they graduate. So, he did his project on woodcarving. He would love to do it all of the time, but he can't work on a job and then do wood carving too. Unless you are, like a housewife that doesn't work, or retired, there is not much time to learn wood carving. Younger people, they have to work! You get more for your woodcarving now than we used to, but its hard to make a living on just wood carving. Well you can't do it. Not and live a comfortable life.

**MN:** How do you advertise? Just by going to these different craft shows. You told me you attend tons of these things is that the major ways of advertising?

**BB:** Yes, you go to these crafts shows and people pick up your business cards. One year we did so many nativity figures that I didn't carve for two years because I got so burnt out at people calling and wanting pieces. At the folk school if someone wants something special and they do not have it over there, they will give them our number or the number of whoever carves that. They can get in touch with us that way.

**MN:** What helps you keep motivated when working on a project? You have told me that it takes so long.

**BB:** The way I am, I am just anxious to see what it looks like when it gets through [laughs]. Sometimes you mess up and you have to start all over, but that's just part of it. You have to keep going.

**MN:** With the mosses and the wise men as religious pieces, do those do well? Do you like making the religious pieces?

**BB:** Those things sell better than anything. They keep a list over here at the folk school with people on the list for years before they [can get a whole set]. I haven't even got a whole set myself. My brother got really sick and they did a benefit and I donated mine as a prize. I haven't gotten another whole set made, I've got part of it.

**MN:** Well, betty, I really appreciate you letting me interview you.

**BB:** You are welcome!

**MN:** Thanks for everything.