

principles in the sure way he talks about his values, and even from the outside of his polished, white brick house off North Capitol Street.

You aren't surprised when you hear about his wife's battle to keep the street clean by sweeping it herself.

Moore was pleased when his two sons went into the trade, but he believes every youngster should get as much education as possible, even if he will take up a trade.

"The only drawback to bricklaying is the seasonal nature of the work. You only work eight months out of the year. The trouble with most bricklayers is that they live in the summer as if they were going to have it all year 'round."

Union bricklayers learn their trade in a three-year apprenticeship program. A satisfactory apprentice makes the grade when he becomes a journeyman bricklayer. At that point he's considered qualified to work just about any job. But being a journeyman doesn't guarantee him work. He still must apply to the contractor, take the layoffs when there's no work, sit at home when it's cold and it snows and building grinds to a halt.

Moore feels strongly that workers trained in this apprenticeship program are better workers.

Morris Moore, Jr., has built his own reputation as a top-quality bricklayer. When he first came on as an apprentice he was very green. "Everyone respected my father, though, and they treated me well. Their primary object was to make me a competent bricklayer."

Moore Jr. doesn't think the younger men have the same respect for the journeymen that he had. "I was afraid to talk back to a bricklayer. . . . These fellers have a different attitude. We try to give them the same concept, that it's our duty to teach them and theirs to learn. But most of them are just interested in eight hours' work."

Moore had thought about becoming an architect at one time but isn't sorry he remained a bricklayer. "You go through different stages in this trade. In the first ten or fifteen years you think you are *the* best. Each person you work with is a challenge. You compete against the others to see how many bricks you can lay and how good a job you can do. But later on, you don't think about it that way. You compete with yourself in the quality of work you can turn out."

The younger Moore worked on the Washington Post building—the newest all-brick building in Washington, D.C. It contained many different kinds of masonry and represented a challenge to the skill of the bricklayer. "When you can do it all in a way that satisfies you, then I guess you can say you feel peace and harmony."

## ANOTHER TOOL IN THE CARPENTER'S CHEST

Archie Green

Within the large boundaries of American Society we recognize that certain sets of people are *folk*, generally by virtue of their singing particular songs or by retaining distinct lifestyles. Persons in folk societies, to some degree, accept the notion that they stand apart from mainstream values. In my personal introduction to carpentry during 1941 (learning the shipwright's craft in San Francisco, Local 1149, United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America), I was not led to think that our trade had been touched by folklore. Perhaps western cowboys, mountain banjo pickers, or Amish farmers might be categorized as folk, but not ordinary *woodbutchers* and *termites*. Yet today, after three decades of talking and listening to carpenters and other building tradesmen, I have come to an understanding that all mechanics, in some measure, cherish traditions which are special to their skills.

Carpenters are well aware of these working *hand-me-downs*. However, they do not use academic or ethnographic terms to describe their trade's traditional behavior: customary beliefs, special slang, tool nicknames, job humor, training techniques, union loyalty. In a sense, carpenters are too busy working to afford the luxury of sitting back to reflect on their special culture. Actually, all skilled workers draw on some traditional expression to convey work practices to apprentices or to build solidarity against alien forces. Nevertheless, an appreciation of their tradition does help "workers in wood" deal with each other as well as with the world beyond the trade.

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One of the purposes of the Festival of American Folklife is to permit the broad public to observe craftsmen at work and to talk with them face to face about working experience. A by-product of this interaction is that the Festival's craft participants become conscious of their roles as teachers. Naturally, mechanics on all urban construction sites know that *sidewalk superintendents* enjoy gawking at work in progress. (Building tradesmen also take *mailmen's holidays* by walking to other sites.) Only infrequently do construction men converse with street watchers. The Festival setting, however, provides an excellent platform from which carpenters can describe their adventures to countless *supers*.

In this brief sketch a few anecdotal bits and pieces are offered which reflect *lumberpile* behavior. I do not mean to suggest that a microphone or camera was concealed in an actual job-site lumberpile. Rather, I wish these words to suggest the casual give-and-take of the noon period when men drop their tools to touch each other with talk, banter, or gesture. Obviously, there is a figurative lumberpile wherever carpenters gather: union halls, bars, cafes, unemployment offices, apprenticeship training centers. One such spot, Carpenters Local 132, is housed within a fifteen-minute walk of the Smithsonian Institution's old stone castle on the Mall.

Listen to Tom Rabbitt, age 25, Marine Corps veteran, apprentice member of Local 1665 in Alexandria, Virginia: "I got out of service and worked non-union as a helper at housebuilding. Working conditions were a bummer. The man wanted you to work all kinds of hours for little or no pay, so I said, 'I'll go union!'"

At one level to "go union" is simply a matter of signing cards, paying dues, and accepting ritual. But at another level, unionism is linking hands with fellow workers to share strength and alter inhumane conditions. Hear old-timer George Brown of Local 1024, Cumberland, Maryland: "When I was growing up the textile and rubber workers first tried to organize their plants in Allegheny County. The deputies came in and beat them to the ground. That was wrong, dead wrong." Unionism is defined here not in a narrow jurisdictional frame, but rather in a large context of moral solidarity, of open fellowship.

I can quote Tom Rabbitt's and George Brown's words because I jotted them down after I met the men. On many walks to and from my present office job, I have talked casually to construction men in downtown Washington. One rainy day a Metro subway foreman (actually an out-of-town piledriver) revealed to me a sharp blend of pride and complaint. The day was tough and the foreman was in the lee of a huge earth-moving machine near Dupont Circle. I was a sympathetic listener by reason of my







*Members of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America enjoy the challenge of working with solid oak and placing gold leaf trim fitted together in ½" sections like a jig-saw puzzle. Naturally, hard hats are worn on outside construction, but this is finishing off the interior of the Grand Ballroom of the Loew's Hotel, L'Enfant Plaza.*

former ambivalence about rainy days. It had been distressing to be sent home because of docked pay; it had been marvelous to have a free day to indulge one's whims. Perhaps the *pilebutt* sensed my comradeship. His talk was familiar enough to have been conveyed to me long ago in California by one of the journeymen from whom I learned the trade. In appropriate droll language the piledriver griped: "When I was a boy my mother told me to stay in school and study. But I was a wise guy and played hooky. And now look at me, a dummy, I have to slave in the rain." This was a complaint and expressed in mock sorrowful language—almost a brag. My friend-of-the-moment was a master at ironic commentary. We both knew that the water dripping off his blue hard hat symbolized not stupidity but strength.

How do carpenters develop the discipline to handle rough out-of-doors work, and the resilience to switch quickly from dangerous mucky footings to detailed interior trim? Does one see a job through from blueprints to the key-in-the-door, or does one get laid off before the job ends? How does one adjust to major technological change that comes within a lifetime with overwhelming rapidity? Must pride-in-craft always be sacrificed on the altar of productivity? What does a mechanic do who is dissatisfied with pasting together plastic hamburger stands? How is a good job defined?

Anthony Giaquinta now trains carpentry apprentices; formerly he ran heavy work on such giant projects as the Rayburn Congressional Office Building. Tony rapped with me recently about his own breaking-in period: "When the man told me to move a ton of crap, I started right in—one shovelful at a time." Struck by the pungency of this figure of speech, I also noted that it was a powerful metaphor for much of life. I refrained from asking Tony whether he knew that Hercules before him as part of his twelve labors had cleaned the Augean Stables "one shovelful at a time." Nor did I ask Tony whether he had made up this anecdotal illustration of job discipline, or whether he heard it from an older worker. Does it matter? As a folklorist I know that he utilized a traditional verbal expression in defining his role as a good carpenter as well as to lighten his work burden. Brother Giaquinta used this linguistic construct as beautifully and economically as he used a saw and hammer—to cut away material, to assemble new meanings, to shape reality.

In bringing together these random conversational bits, I am aware that I have avoided a full catalog of conventional folklore; there are no dramatic ballads in my sketch, no close description of a job initiation prank, no detailed analysis of a cabinet maker's "performance" in the shop, no legends about union pioneer Peter J. McGuire. Nor have I spun a web of trade nicknames. Who can identify *whiskey stick*, *Swede hand axe*, *Norwegian steam*, or *dollar mark*? Who has been sent to fetch a pair of board stretchers? What does the eagle do on payday? Where is the golden rivet driven?

Some day a young carpenter will be caught up by the study of folklore and will undertake an ethnographic description of his trade. What dynamics, today, mold the attitudes of men towards work? Where are tools collected and displayed? Where did the joiners who fashioned Solomon's Temple gain their skill? Was Noah the first shipwright? What query about carpentry did Hamlet put to the gravedigger? What role did Philadelphia's Carpenter's Hall play in our nation's origin? Are such old questions still meaningful to the workers who pave America with cloverleaf intersections, or who plant little box houses in urban wastelands?

Hopefully, a carpentry apprentice—perhaps a Smithsonian Festival participant or visitor—will soon become curious about his usage of craft tradition. The studies of history, anthropology, and folklore need not be strange to building tradesmen. Anyone who can read a complex set of plans, or who can look into an excavation and see a soaring building rising out of the hole can handle ethnographic data. To reflect on the traditional aspect of our trade is but to sharpen another tool in the carpenter's chest.