

Roadside Handicraft Shop Bids You Welcome

Preserves the Spirit of the Homespun Age

by Unknown Author

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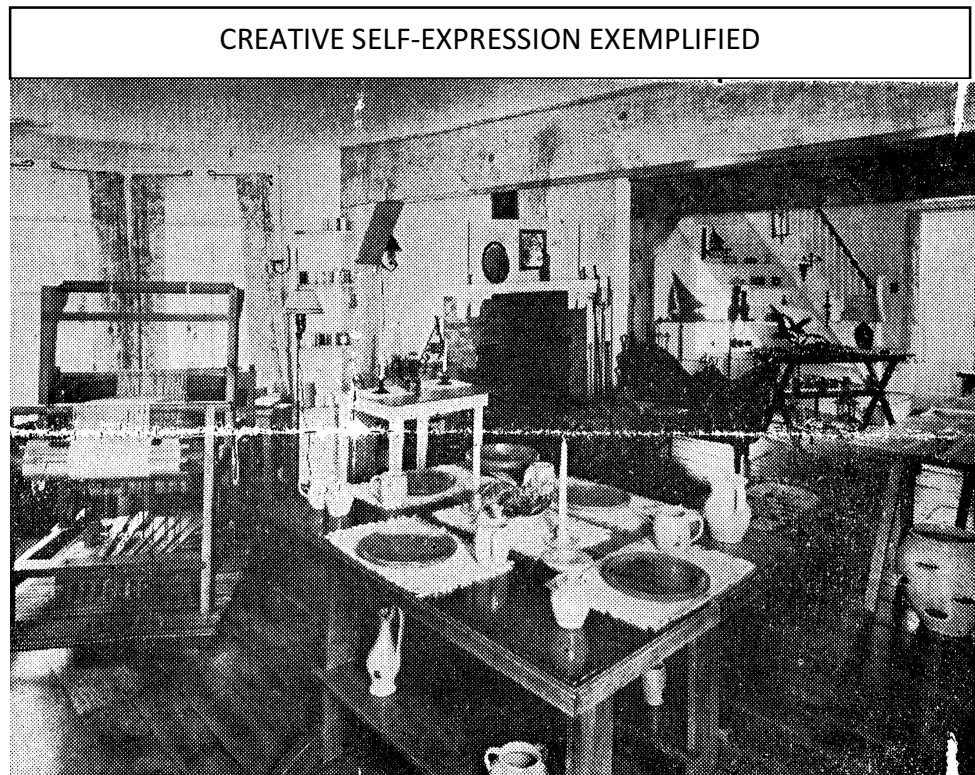
Despite the fact that it has been in operation here throughout the past Winter and Spring, we wonder how many of the people of Cooperstown have visited the shop of the Roadside Craftsman, Inc., on Lake Street. It is located in the buildings formerly occupied by the [word missing] Anchor Tea Room.

For that [words

missing] we also wonder how many are aware of the fact that in this shop the village boasts a unit of one of the state's most distinctive industries.

If this fits you, why not conduct a personal excursion to No. 96 Lake Street? No, you don't have to make an appointment, simply open the door and walk in. You will find yourself in a completely different and extremely attractive world, for this is not a workshop of machines and mass production, but one of creative self-expression and skilled handiwork.

Travellers in the western part of our state need no introduction to the Roadside Craftsman shops. They have visited the Avon Coppersmith at East Avon; the Smiths at Hemlock and the Bristol Gift House in Canandaigua besides the main shop at East Bloomfield, and marveled at the skill of the workmen and the beauty and the utility of their products.



Interior view of Roadside Handicraft shop on Lake Street, Cooperstown

Headquarters Shop

Headquarters of the Roadside Craftsman is situated at East Bloomfield where a church building more than a century old has been transformed into a three-story workshop. The art of pottery making is carried on by craftsmen in a manner that combines the simplicity of primitive methods with the benefits of modern ceramic knowledge. Nearby a fellow-worker on wood produces hand turned dishes and trays of native gum and maple wood, novelties on rare tropical woods and inlaid items. Before the loom, a weaver brings back an art almost lost with the passing of the homespun age. Work in both the metal shops in Hemlock and East Avon have been discontinued for the duration of the war.

United under a cooperative system, these artists ply their varied crafts by the side of the road; hence the name. The production from each shop is offered for sale in all shops but guests are not solicited to buy. Those who do buy, however, find the prices unexpectedly reasonable.

The real purpose of the enterprise is to help eventually renew interest in the hand crafts. Museums, historical and educational organizations, writers and publishers and, by no means least or last, the antique dealers and collectors have helped make us conscious of the value of things in our past. Seeing craftsmen fashion household and other articles by hand as our ancestors did, is only one more way of making us conscious of our rich American heritage and of renewing an interest and an appreciation in all work done by hand.

Sage of the Craftsmen

We quote the following regarding the beginning and formative years of the Roadside Craftsmen:

"The Roadside Craftsmen, Inc., had its beginning in the single tense – The Craft of Pottery. In 1929, following a motor trip to Florida, and possessed with the idea of "See it made," C. E. Wemett of Hemlock laid out a replica of a southern primitive pottery along Route 5, near East Bloomfield. Guy Daughterty, a native of Texas, who for the past nine years has demonstrated hand-thrown pottery-making at the State Fair, literally worked by the roadside amazing his watchers by his ability to fashion beautiful and graceful shapes from mounds of wet clay. Various students from the State School of Ceramics at Alfred, worked with the glazing and firing of the pottery. One young lady in particular remained as Mrs. Norris Wemett, daughter-in-law to Mr. Wemett and co-worker with her husband, who for the past ten years has been acting head of Roadside Craftsmen.

"Weaving was included as a craft in 1930 and the lady in this field whose flying shuttle wins our respect and admiration is Mrs. Nora Taylor, a native of Berea KY. Six of Mrs. Taylor's pupils are Roadside Craftsmen weavers.

"In 1936, the Baptist church of Branchport, was moved and rebuilt at East Bloomfield and wood turning

was added as another craft here. One cannot watch Homer Bullock, woodcrafter, turn something on the lathe from a beautiful piece of wood without recognizing his real love and knowledge for all kinds of woods. The art of the wood craftsman, like that of the Potter and the Weaver, lies in the simplicity and the utility of the articles which can be made from inexpensive and everyday materials.

Has 5 Assistants

“in 1931, Arthur Cole, a former craftsman of Roycroft, East Aurora, went to East Avon as the Avon Coppersmith. During normal times, Mr. Cole had five assistants and the din of hammering and the whirl of metal serves well to impress upon the watcher the skill and patience necessary to produce beautiful articles in copper and brass.

“The noise at the Copper shop is second only to the hammering of the worker in wrought iron at the Smiths at Hemlock, Clarence Curtis. Braving the blaze of the open forge to observe the heating of heavy strips of iron is perhaps the most thrilling of all craft work to watch. Out of the grimy, black dust and flying sparks comes the strongest and most useful of the craftsmen materials – wrought iron. Durable and common, it shares with weaving a respected place among the craft necessities of our early ancestors.

“From 1937 until 1942, Mr. Curtis shared his title of “Smithy” with Eugene Manchester, a Silversmith of marked ability who died this past winter. In the craft of the Silversmith, more than in any other, artistic ability plays an integral part. In all hand work the maker gives something of his self in the designing and fashioning of silver it is most evident. Beside the craft work of Mr. Manchester, Mr. Jennings, a Roycroft craftsman, has been a part-time contributor.

The work of the Silversmith brings us up to the newest shop in the guild and to the baby of the craft family, Miss Deborah Sweet. Since its opening in November, 1941, Miss Sweet has been at the Roadside Handicraft shop at Cooperstown, making jewelry. She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, the leading metal craft training school in this country. Miss Deborah possesses ability in design and skill in craftsmanship as simple and charming as her name would suggest.

“Five crafts that have come down through the ages. Five skills that the machine would master. But, five craftsmen, by the roadside, keeping alive the memory of the hand work of these crafts; that is the saga of the Roadside Craftsman.”

Recaptures the Past

Following, as this article does, the opening of the Farm and Handicraft display at the Historical Museum here, it serves as one more reason why we people of Cooperstown should realize our importance as a village in preserving the culture and crafts of our past. As our historical museum shelters actual Art and Craft remains, the Roadside Craftsmen are dedicated to keeping alive the knowledge and methods of

making these same household articles and implements that played such an important part in the daily lives of our ancestors.

Mrs. Ruth Kenzie, who is already well known to us, is the Daughter of C. E. Wemett and manager of the Roadside Handicraft shop here. She has had instruction at Alfred University in both weaving and pottery making and, we are sure, has inherited from her father, a keen interest in all handcraft work. We have been assured by Mrs. Kenzie that everyone is welcome to come in and visit the shop at No. 96 Lake Street, even if you aren't interested in buying. Your questions and suggestions will be equally welcome.

To help the community to become better acquainted with this unique enterprise, G. Reed Sill has graciously offered a window for a week's display – of Roadside Craftsmen articles. Mrs. Kenzie will have a loom inside the store and will demonstrate weaving. Be sure to make a point of stopping in! Learn, at first hand, about handcrafts, and about Roadside Craftsmen in particular by "Seeing it made."

Webmaster's Note: Mrs. Ruth Kenzie later became Mrs. Ruth Woodruff. Moving back to Hemlock, she became the original owner and operator of the 1812 Country Store on Route 15A in Hemlock, NY. You can find articles regarding the 1812 Country Store on our Articles and Obituary page by clicking the link below.

http://www.wemett.net/articles_and_obits/articles_and_obits_index.html