



The Wood Carver of Westfield

In that long and tempestuous period of rehabilitation following the Civil War, when Westfield was a sprawling township of twice its present area, a young chap tramped over the hills and through the woodlands of this countryside studying nature at first hand. He was curious and observant and each excursion led to a memorable discovery. The sun became his timepiece and compass; the trees his guide and calendar. Soon he knew all the ancient landmarks, the Indian lore, old trails and old farmsteads. In late years, the vivid impressions of these boyhood experiences were to find artistic expression as with deft hand he portrayed them in stone and wood.

John Brunner was born on Radley Road, in what is now Scotch Plains. His father was in the steel and die-sinking and engraving business in New York, and his four sons, as they reached maturity, became partners in the firm. All of them are gifted in this craft, but John, the eldest, is the artist. He sought broader fields in which to develop his natural talent. First he studied drawing under Count Zalitzky, who conducted a school on Westfield Avenue. The late Charles Darsh, a well-known local architect; Bish Chamberlain and Louis Ganzel were his classmates. The Count had difficulty keeping up with a pupil who could draw as well as he; and John soon left to enter the art school at Cooper Union, where he completed a course in sculpturing. His vacations were spent abroad studying the work of the master painters and sculptors in the art galleries of England, France and Germany, and making sketches of art objects and rural scenes as he traveled from place to place.

John Brunner can work magic with his hands;—can fashion a cupboard or table that

would do credit to the woodcarvers of Salem and Philadelphia. At Leigh Pearsall's winter home, in Melrose, Fla., where he was frequently a guest, he spent most of the daylight hours carving and modeling in wood and stone. With axe and gouges, he cut a log out of a live oak and from it chiseled and carved a magnificent Indian head. From a piece of camphor wood, found in a brush heap, he made a miniature elephant, using ham bone for the tusks. It is regarded as a perfect model. A log of wild cherry, which seemed fit only for the fireplace, he converted into an intriguing character study of the head of George Washington. He carved medallions of Shirley Temple, a tennis girl, a tousel-haired boy (remarkable for sweetness of expression), Shirley Cooper, Leigh Pearsall's grandddaughter; Indian weather-vanes, totem poles, bows and tomahawks from slabs of cypress.

One of his most striking as well as most difficult works was the modeling of an Indian head in concrete directly on to a wire frame. The modeling had to be completed before the concrete set, in about ten hours, and speed as well as dexterity were necessary. After it had set he applied the chisel to perfect the features.

His Indian heads, weapons and utensils are highly esteemed by connoisseurs. Show him wood of any form or kind and he will know how best to use it. When Dr. Bob Sinclair came to Melrose for a winter's holiday, a brand new motorboat was tied to the wharf awaiting his pleasure. John had made it out of driftwood and had named it Shirley—after Dr. Bob's daughter.

Since the summer camps were organized, more than a generation ago, John Brunner