

Anniversary Profiles

Betty J. Scarpino, Member #1001



photo by Terry Martin

What motivated you to join the fledgling AAW?

I was introduced to the AAW when I was living in San Marcos, Texas, in 1986 where I met Bob Rubel, AAW's first administrator. Bob contacted me to ask if I would consult with him about his shopmade lathe and he also wanted help with woodturning techniques. I'm not sure I was of much help, but the outcome was learning about the AAW. I joined right away, happy to find a community of woodturners.

Do you still have American Woodturner back issues? Where do you keep them?

Throughout the years, I saved back issues of American Woodturner, but ended up giving some of them away to Rick Mastelli, who edited the journal in the 1990s. He needed them for historical research and the office didn't have all the back issues.

Who or what was your greatest teacher?

For my first woodturning project (while I was an industrial arts student at the University of Missouri in the 1970s), I turned a spindle for a pedestal table. My second turning was a bowl from cherry. My professor, Dabney Doty, had instructed me to screw the wood directly onto a faceplate.



In the thirty weeks leading up to AAW's 30th Anniversary Symposium in Atlanta, we will be sharing the stories of members who joined in 1986 and are still members today. We hope you enjoy their memories and insights!

Click [here](#) to read this and other profiles online.

About Betty J. Scarpino

Betty J. Scarpino is familiar to all AAW members as the former editor of *American Woodturner*, but her work as a sculptor, printmaker, writer and teacher is equally well-respected.

Since leaving her most recent stint as editor (she served from 1991-1993 and 2009-2014), Betty has traveled to China as an invited artist; received the Collectors of Wood Art Lifetime Achievement Award, and been selected for the Center for Art in Wood's 2016 Wingate International Turning Exchange residency.

According to her website, "Betty Scarpino was born in 1949 in Wenatchee, Washington. Her career began in the seventies, when she produced purely functional pieces. While these early years did not develop artistic innovation, Scarpino mastered the techniques that

Not satisfied with that solution, I said, "Absolutely not! I don't want screw holes in the bottom of my bowl." He came up with the solution of a glue block and a paper joint. I happily scraped and sanded the turning block into submission ... for 12 hours. After parting the bowl off the lathe, I sanded the bottom flat. I was thrilled with my first turned bowl!

Dabney Doty was probably the most influential instructor in my career--his attention to form, detail, and proper woodworking techniques gave me a solid foundation for the future. It was from Mr. Doty that I learned the working properties of many species of native hardwoods. Michael Hosaluk, John Jordan, Merryll Saylan, and Steve Loar were also influential early in my career. I benefitted greatly from a lot of formal education, as an industrial arts student and from classes at Arrowmont School of Arts and Crafts.

What do you see as the biggest changes in the field?

From 1990-1993 and again from 2009-2014, I edited *American Woodturner* journal. Over the past 30 years, I witnessed incredible changes in the woodturning field: New lathes, tools, and materials make turning more pleasurable. A big hurra for variable-speed lathes! Perhaps the biggest change, however, was the turning process itself with the seemingly universal use of green wood. The process of using green wood for turning bowls is vastly different from using dry lumber. Recently, many woodturners are adding surface embellishment to turned objects and also employing different methods of using the lathe to create sculpture. As much as these changes are significant, I believe woodturners are only beginning to explore the infinite possibilities of working wood using the lathe.

A noteworthy shift happening now is the growing number of women who are making woodturning their hobby and profession. I see evidence this trend will continue, and I hope manufacturers will soon recognize the need for smaller-scale tools and machines designed for women.

If you could give your 30-years-younger self some advice about being a turner what would you say?

Using the lathe as a basis for creating sculpture is a limitation. It was from Steve Loar that I learned formal design and the essential concept of limitations for creativity. During the 1990s, I began exploring the combination of woodturning and carving, still my passion today. Would I want to change anything in my past? Not really ... I'm pleased to be where I'm at, enjoying working with wood and appreciate its infinite possibilities!

I wish the AAW happy birthday and hope the organization continues strongly for another 30 years and beyond!

See more work on Betty Scarpino's website:
www.bettyscarpino.com/

now create her sculptural and non-functional pieces. She has a degree in industrial arts from the University of Missouri where she also studied wood sculpture."

With work in numerous private and public collections, including that of the Mint Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Yale University Art Museum, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Betty is a recognized master in the field. Her work is offered for sale in many fine art galleries throughout the United States.

Betty lives in Indianapolis, Indiana.

*Some content from
bettyscarpino.com.*





*Cherry Seed Pod, 2015. 19"long x 3" wide. Cherry wood.
Photo by Wilbur Montgomery.*



Stepping Out of Line, 1996. Maple, bleach, paint. 12" diameter. Photo by Judy Ditmer.

Stepping Out of Line might be my most influential piece. I made it for AAW's first invited exhibition Growth Through Sharing, and a photo of it was on the cover of the catalog. I consciously used the title Stepping Out of Line because I was doing just that: In 1996, carving a turned object and/or painting wood was considered heresy by many.

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