

Unique Wood!



BY DAVE BOYT

Emerson Park Tree Farm, just southeast of Akron, Ohio, is more than a working tree farm. Susanna Pugh and her husband, Melvin, started the 30-acre tree farm in 1976. Located in the rolling hills of northeast Ohio, the tree farm features a variety of hardwood species, including beech, maple, oak, ash, boxelder, and elm. The tree farm's name honors Susanna's paternal grandfather, Ralph Emerson Furbay, who owned the property in the 1960s. Susanna recalled that her grandfather spent a lot of time in the woods, thinning and pruning the forest, but never used a chain saw. "Both of my grand-

fathers were woodsmen, so I spent a lot of time tramping out in the woods," she recalled.

When Susanna and Melvin took over the tree farm, it was mostly an old beechwood forest. "We harvested most of the beech to encourage hard maples," Susanna recalled. With the best hard maple trees left for seed trees, Emerson Park Tree Farm is well on its way to becoming a quality oak/maple forest. "We've also been thinning, pruning, and caring for the riparian area—just about everything you can do, we've been doing it," says Susanna. "Working in the woods was something we enjoyed doing together. We were named the northeastern Ohio outstanding tree farm for our management and stewardship," she added. Although Melvin passed away in 2016, spry 74-years young Susanna con-

Left: Where most people see defects, Susanna sees character in a hollow maple log. Not content to have area sawmills provide her slabs, she purchased her own mill and hired John Rohr, a local contractor, to saw her logs while she learns to run the mill herself.

tinues to manage the tree farm with the support and assistance of the Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association. “Melvin was very active in the Northeastern Ohio Forestry Association and assisted in the chain saw safety education program. They loved Melvin, and I really appreciate their help and input.”

As she surveyed the wood left behind after routine harvests, as well as the aftermath of storms, Susanna decided that she was not satisfied to see potentially valuable wood go to waste and looked for ways to market it. “The local woodturner’s group has changed my whole thinking about my woodlot,” Susanna explained. “Before, we just had a timber harvester come in and take the logs.” Three years ago, after the last harvest, Susanna noticed a lot of interesting pieces left behind. “I couldn’t bear to use them for firewood, so my husband brought some up for me to work with.” When Susanna inquired about selling some of these interesting pieces at the nearby Hartville Hardware and Lumber company, they introduced her to Bill Stone, a local woodworker. “He came over, we jumped in the Gator and went out into the woods. He was like a kid in a candy store, and we loaded up the Gator with all kinds of stumps, crotch pieces, and short cuts, and he was thrilled,” Susanna recalled. “Bill is a master woodturner. He started to tell me about spalting and burls, and I got very excited.” Two days later, Bill brought his woodturning club to the tree farm, and they filled up six or seven pickup trucks with walnut, butternut, and cherry pieces that the loggers had left behind. The club has been out there three times now. “Bill has changed my life in showing me what the wood could become. He is my mentor.”

With the encouragement of local woodworkers, Susanna is now busy building up her business of selling unique wood. One of her first products was cookies cut from one of her logs. When she took them to nearby Keim Lumber of Charm, Ohio for sanding, they bought a dozen—her first sale. Hartville Hardware/lumber division, a nearby lumber dealer, has an area set aside for her products, which they sell to local woodworkers. But Susanna says it isn’t all about the money. “The woodworkers are always kind,” she says. In addition to advice, they have given her a number of pieces of their work that were built, carved, or turned from wood she

Lucas Portable Sawmills

1260BF/HR in the 2017

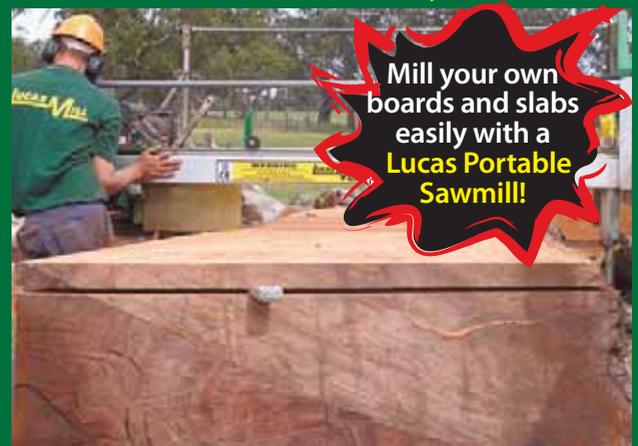
The Great Portable Sawmill Shoot-Out™



Only mill in the 20 year history of this event to cut more than 1000 bf/hr without the help or need of a secondary edging machine.

North American Distributor:
Bailey's

Need a new sawmill and want the
“Best Bang for your Buck” ?
Look no further than the Lucas Mill
Best performing, best value for money Sawmill
Do the math and see for yourself!



888 465 8227
www.baileysonline.com



Susanna shows off a maple slab door on a sliding barn door track. She works with a few woodworkers who transform slab wood from her mill into doors, tables, benches, and other furniture.



Woodturner Bill Stone gets a lot of his raw material from the Emerson Park Tree Farm. Here, he shows off some of his turnings at the 2018 Paul Bunyan Show in Cambridge, Ohio.

has provided.

Susanna's garage showroom is filled with projects in progress and stacks of lumber of nearly all local species, ranging from small boards to thick tabletop slabs, stickered in various stages of drying. "This is wood from a cucumber magnolia tree," she explained. "The logger said it wasn't worth cutting, but I had him bring it in for milling, just so I could see what it looks like. It has a nice smooth grain. And over here is a piece of red elm. For several years, I'd go through the woods and see these standing dead trees, and nobody knew what they were. I had them cut down and brought to the sawmill. It turns out that red elm is beautiful wood. That's why I'm having so much fun with this!"

Even without an inventory system, Susanna can tell customers exactly what is in every stack and when it was cut. She also has tables, benches, and chairs for sale, built by local craftsmen from her wood. But her most treasured pieces are not for sale at any price. The inside of her home is like a gallery with dozens of bowls, carvings, and other furniture given to her by her woodworking friends.

A good example of the type of unusual wood Susanna works with is a hollow 5-foot-diameter maple log. "It was a massive, hollow silver maple on my property," she explained. "I had a logger cut it, and we ground out as much rot as we could." She estimates that she and a carpenter spent around 8 hours preparing just this one piece for sale. "The idea is to make it look like it just came out of the woods. Plus, we had to pay the logger, so there is a lot more in these pieces than it appears," she noted.

"The inside has a lot of interest, so I'm thinking of putting a glass top on it, and maybe have a local woodcarver carve some figures in it. Another piece from the same tree is in the driveway where Susanna is removing all the loose bark and rotted wood. While she has several carpenters that she works with, Susanna does a lot of the tedious hand work herself.

Susanna's network of friends and business contacts gives her access to specialized equipment that would not be practical for a small shop. For example, one of the carpenters she works with bought a 50-inch planer—handy when it comes to surfacing some of the wide slabs she sells. "I also work with an amateur blacksmith club up in Cleveland, and they made some of the metal bases. I wanted something with an artistic touch, but not too fancy, and that's opened up new possibilities," she explained. Another person in her network specializes in resin filling for design and filling cracks in wide slabs. All this fit together in making unique wood available to woodworkers as well as to buyers of her own creations.

The missing link, Susanna admits, is in kiln drying her wood. "Nobody in this area does custom drying, so I'm going to build a kiln next spring," she said. Currently, she has wood in a tarp-covered greenhouse with a heater and fans. While not an optimal system, it suffices for now. On warm, sunny days, it will reach 112°F and eventually the wood drops down to 6% moisture content. A solar kiln is on her short list of things to add to her growing business.

The recent acquisition of a Cooks AC-36 sawmill has opened up a world of creative possibilities for Susanna. A hollow, misshaped, silver maple log—a gift from her

plumber who had it removed from his yard—was on the hydraulic loading arms, waiting to be milled. While most people would toss this log on the reject pile, Susanna could hardly contain her excitement over finding out what was inside. She is learning to run the sawmill, so she had John Rohr, a “jack of all trades,” come over and saw it up. John turned the log so that the hollow was on the top to maximize the holes in the first few boards. It took only a couple of cuts to open up the cavernous hollow inside and the wood was spalted throughout its length. A few more cuts revealed a thriving colony of black ants that clearly did not share Susanna’s enthusiasm for milling the log. As each slab came off, she stopped to admire it and made a decision on how thick the next cut should be. “We can fill that one with resin,” she noted, “and that top slab with a hole in it would make a great mounting for taxidermy.” Logs on the deck waiting to be cut include more red elm and a cherry log that a friend brought over. “We’re still learning, so milling is slow,” she says, “but we’re getting a lot of good product out of it.”

“This [business] fell into my lap,” Susanna explained. “I saw the opportunity and decided to pursue it. This has really expanded my horizons. I knew quite a bit about forestry, but not about processing wood or how to make money at it. I consider it a hobby, for now, but it is quickly becoming a full-time



Susanna’s two-car garage is a showroom, drying area, and storage for slabs and unusual wood from nearly every hardwood species native to central Ohio.

business. I’m really enjoying this work. I am having fun, learning a lot, meeting a lot of interesting people, and taking on this venture has really helped me grow as a person.” ■

Dave Boyt has a BS degree in Forest Management and an MS in Wood Technology. He manages a tree farm (2006 Missouri Tree Farm of the Year), and operates a band saw sawmill.



FIREWOOD PROCESSORS



New Grapple Assist for crooked logs



2016 Cord King line-up; Big-to-Small




Since 1978 Cord King has been producing the world’s best firewood processing equipment with the **BEST WARRANTY** bar none.






- Wedge and splitter design to suit your needs.
- 24- to 72-ton splitting capability
- The fastest splitting cycle time on the planet.

www.cordking.ca

1-888-219-9663

VIDEO LINK: 