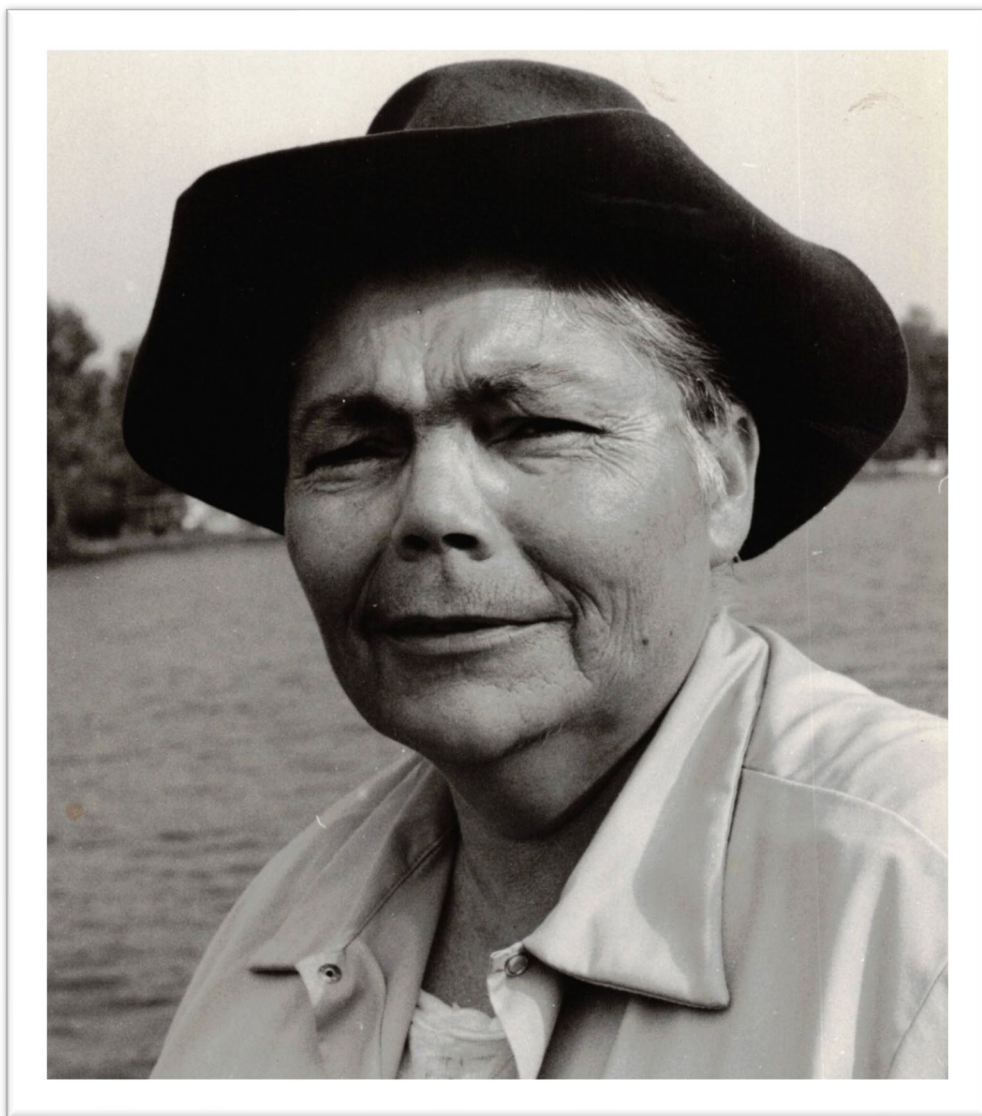


Rick St. John: carver and community builder

by Ellen Adamsons, ©2024



Acknowledgements

We are honored that Rick St. John generously opened his home to us, trusting us to document the interconnection of his life, community, and art. Further armed with his lifetime of news clippings, photographs, and carvings, we selected only a portion of his achievements. Thank you, Rick and Rita.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Rick St. John: carver and community builder	4
Family history.....	4
Education	4
Profession	5
Raising and training of beagles.....	5
Fishing, hunting, and conservation	6
Citizens band radio (CB radio)	8
Hand carving	8
First carvings	9
Large hand carvings.....	10
Birds	11
Indigenous themes.....	18
Humorous themes.....	24
Small and seasonal hand carved themes.....	26
Studio and workshop	27
Rick's original basswood demonstration models	31
A sample of Rick's carving activities, demos, and exhibits, 1995 - 2024.....	33
Credits.....	35

Rick St. John: carver and community builder

Rick St. John is a family- and community-minded, "hands on" Renaissance Man who has lived over sixty years in the rural village of Kars, Ontario. He is an accomplished award-winning carver, printer, hunter, fisherman, and conservationist, and is also known for developing a new line of champion hunting beagles. In all of these pursuits, Rick St. John is recognized for his generous and limitless capacity to cultivate and share excellence.

Family history

Rick's paternal grandfather, Alexander St. John, married a Mohawk woman whose ancestry included Joseph Brant. Rick's father, also named Alex, was born in 1902 in Maxwell, Ontario and fought in the Second World War. Rick's maternal grandfather, Dan Smith (1872-1948), was in the British Army and trained militia in Cornwall. He was married to Laura Sauv  (born 1880) and their daughter Ida Smith was Rick's mother. Both the Smith and the St. John histories are currently being researched by family members.

Rick was born in Eastview, Ontario in 1932, one of seven children. The St. John siblings have remained close. Rick's older brothers Don and Eric, and two younger brothers Oliver and Ronald, had military careers. Rick's brother Reuben established himself as a noted artist, as well as a printer and page designer for Aiken Printing Service. Their only sister Norma became a housewife.

Rick married Rita Jolicoeur in 1955. She is active with volunteer community work and her husband's charitable projects. Rita is a bilingual francophone born in Nova Scotia and related to the first French settlers, the Doiron family. She was an editor of marketing reports for the Government of Canada.

Their first daughter died at birth in 1963. Darlene, born July 15, 1965, became a champion baton twirler and won many ribbons and trophies in competition both in Canada and the United States. She taught dance, owned a dance/skate supply store, and designed specialist athletic clothing. Darlene's daughter Jamie Lee is a graphic artist and mother to a young son.

Education

At Glashan Public School, Ottawa, Grade 7 teacher Mr. Pontiac recognized and encouraged Rick's carving talent. Rick attended Ottawa Technical High School, majoring in printing. In 1949, he won second place in a public speaking competition for all Ottawa high schools; he also wrote the speech for his friend who won first place.

Profession

In 1951, Rick began employment as a printer and typesetter (by hand) at Aiken Printing Service for 40 cents an hour. In 1953 he started work for R.L. Crain Ltd., where he worked for forty years. He retired in 1992, receiving a Bulova Accutron gold watch. During those years, Rick also participated, organized, and ran the annual fishing derby sponsored by R.L. Crain Ltd.



Supervisor Dennis Alexander presents Rick with a Long Service Award, October 1992.

Raising and training of beagles

Rick purchased his first beagle in 1956. Both Rick and Rita held executive positions in the Ottawa Valley Beagle Club and donated the St. John trophy for trial competitions. Ottawa Valley Beagle Club activities were reported in Gunner Anglin's Fish and Game columns of the *Ottawa Citizen* from 1960-62. Rick's expanding interest in beagles prompted him and his wife to purchase a rural property near the village of Kars, Ontario in 1962. They settled into the community where Rick became one of the founding members of the Kars Recreation Association (RA).

The association's family-oriented opening events were photographed and recorded in the *South Carleton Gazette* (July 26, 1963). As well, the events were recorded for posterity in the *Kars Women's Institute Tweedsmuir History* (1963). Although dog shows became a Kars Fair specialty, Rick's interest was mainly in developing his hunting dogs. Over time, Rick bred a new line of champion hunting beagles under the registered name Haresong Beagle. He had remarkable results in developing Canadian and American champions. They were often featured in the newspapers of the day. A photograph of Rick St. John and his beagles in action appeared in the *Ottawa Citizen*, March 10, 1977, captioned "President of The Ottawa Valley Beagle Club leads a group of hunting beagles into a rabbit bush during winter". Grant Hopkins of the *Ottawa Citizen* Outdoors column wrote a feature article about Rick's plans to breed a field-trial champion that would also be a show champion (Dec. 9, 1982).

Both Rick and Rita are Honorary Life Members of the Ottawa Valley Beagle Club.



Rick shows a prize-winning Haresong Beagle, 1970.

Fishing, hunting, and conservation

Rick St. John is well-known for his experience and expertise as a fisherman, hunter, and conservationist. While he was a teenager, Rick's Palomar (Polymer) fishing knot invention was discovered at the Ottawa Exhibition (ca. 1945). Encouraged to enter a knot competition by local sportswriter Lorne Whitty, Rick won. The fishing knot is now used worldwide, although Rick did not receive formal credit for it.

A hunting and fishing magazine, believing Rick to be an adult, commissioned him to write a column under the pseudonym "Ranger Rick". He continued writing the column for six months for a "tidy sum of money" until he felt he had run out of interesting things to say. Rick's knowledge was gained at an early age through travelling with his father on hunting and fishing trips and was added to by his own inquisitive nature.

Rick's fishing, hunting, and conservation activities were regularly reported for decades in the *Ottawa Citizen* by sports columnists Jim Slotek and Grant Hopkins, and in the *Sunday Herald* by Lorne Whitty. In 1984, Rick caught the largest pickerel (28 inches, 10 pounds) in the Rideau River on a homemade jig. Rick moulded and painted his own lead head jigs. In 1986, Rick and Eddie Benjamin caught a 33-pound, 47-inch Muskie while fishing on the Rideau River.



Lorne Whitty, "Husky Muskie," *The Sunday Herald*, November 23, 1986.

Rick was congratulated in 2000 by the Grenville Carleton Conservation & Sportsman Club for his outstanding contributions over more than twenty years in the areas of habitat conservation for both fish and wildlife. Specific projects included construction of an Osprey nesting platform, raising of walleye fry, walleye spawning bed rehabilitation at Burritt's Rapids and Kemptville Creek on the Rideau River system, construction of bluebird nesting boxes, and tree planting in eastern Ontario.

The 30th Annual Kid's Fishing Derby at the Kars RA Centre in support of the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) was run by Rick and his associates for over thirty years until May 2002, when an issue about insurance costs regarding the dock nearly closed the event. The Grenville Carleton Conservation & Sportsman Club who had built and maintained the dock voted to donate it to the Kars RA, because they qualified for a much lower insurance rate and could authorize public access. The event was renamed Kars RA First Annual Kids Derby in July 2002.

Citizens band radio (CB radio)

Rick adopted the voice communication technology Citizens band radio early in the 1960s and his family enjoyed exchanging salty and cheeky stories with people all through North America. In further years, he helped radio station CFRA by providing local information for traffic reports. He and his family also used it during their many road trips through the United States and Canada to prize winning competitions and exhibitions. The tall antenna identified Rick's Kars home until 2000 when it was taken down during a roof replacement.

Hand carving

Rick's carving talent was initially recognized by his Grade 7 art teacher at Glashan Public School in 1947. His first carvings of a farm couple remain in his private collection.

Rick earned a certificate for the Wildlife in Wood course at the Sir Guy Carleton Night School, Ottawa in November 1992. He has also taken carving instruction from accomplished wood sculptor John Leeder.

In 1991, Rick joined the Outaouais Wood Carvers (OWC) who specialized in teaching and promoting a professional standard of wood hand-carving in members. They in turn developed their skills through practice, public demonstrations, exhibitions, and teaching. Rick also gives private instruction and particularly enjoys teaching children how to carve in wood and in soap. Both he and Rita are honorary life members of the OWC through their participation in many exhibitions and activities on behalf of the club.

The following photographs show a sample of carvings from Rick St. John's collection. Favorite themes are birds, humor, Indigenous culture, and smaller seasonal figures. His works demonstrate his wonderful talent for capturing lifelike details in wood.

First carvings



European Farm Couple, 1947

Two basswood carved figures, each 40 cm. tall, in Rick St. John collection

Large hand carvings



Two Beagle Puppies in a Boot, 2016

Fine basswood hand carving of two miniature-sized beagle puppies in a life-size 11 hunting boot, painted brown with moveable carved shoelaces. Exhibited widely, it won first place in wood shows. The artist turned down \$2,600 for the carving.

Birds



Shoe with Four Chickadees, 2018

Fine basswood hand carving of a size 11 open shoe with laces containing four life-size Chickadees, one with a carved monarch butterfly larva in its beak. Exhibited in Peterborough and Belleville, winning first prize. Also won "Best in Show" and "People's Choice" awards in 2018.



Carving, shoe model, and sketch for *Shoe with Four Chickadees*



Flying Eagle, 2007

Fine hand-carved basswood flying eagle with wings in flight, balanced on driftwood attached to an oak base. The eagle is a miniature size with wingspan tip-to-tip approx. 31 cm. Retained in Rita's private collection. Of note, this piece shows the influence of John Leeder.



Flying Blue Jay, 2023

Hand-carved basswood flying blue jay in actual size, mounted on a stand. Carved earlier, but Rick St. John later completed painting the body with nine different shades of blue, July 2023.



Male and female Cardinals, 1996

Hand-carved basswood male and female cardinals of actual size painted in appropriate colors, perched on finished driftwood, and mounted on an oak base. First carvings for Rita St. John's birthday and retained in her personal collection.



Chickadees with Pail, 2009

Five basswood hand-carved and painted chickadees eating seeds spilled from a pail. This piece was seasonally staged and featured on the cover of *Lee Valley Tools Catalogue* over two separate years. A prize winner in exhibition.



A selection of individually carved and painted birds in Rick's studio, 2023. In the foreground, notice the Green Winged Teal in life size.

Indigenous themes



Wood Spirit, 1995

Hand-carved butternut wood face with clusters of leaves under the nose, over the ears, eyebrows, and top of the head. Included with this work is a copy of the legend of the Wood Spirit. Length 26 cm.

Legend of the Wood Spirit

Most often glimpsed as a green man with leaves for his beard and hair, he is said to be Lord of the Forest and Natural Things. Seeing one is considered to be quite a lucky thing, and European villagers used to go out on regular hunts, hoping to find a Wood Spirit to foretell the future of their village.

It is said that the forest will stand for as long as the Wood Spirit remains to keep order. If you are lucky enough to see one, health, happiness and good fortune will be yours. But that doesn't happen often, as Wood Spirits would rather see than be seen. Most sightings are by children and the pure in heart.

Legend of the Wood Spirit

A copy of the legend included with each Wood Spirit carving. Most sightings of the Wood Spirit are by children and the pure in heart.



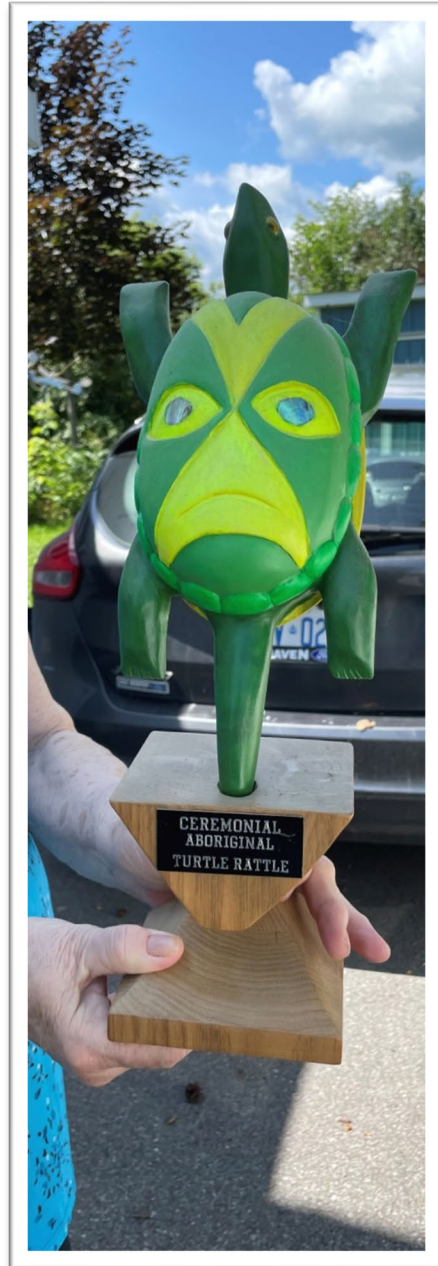
Chief Dan George, 2012

This butternut carving of Chief Dan George won two first prizes in exhibition. Height 23 cm.

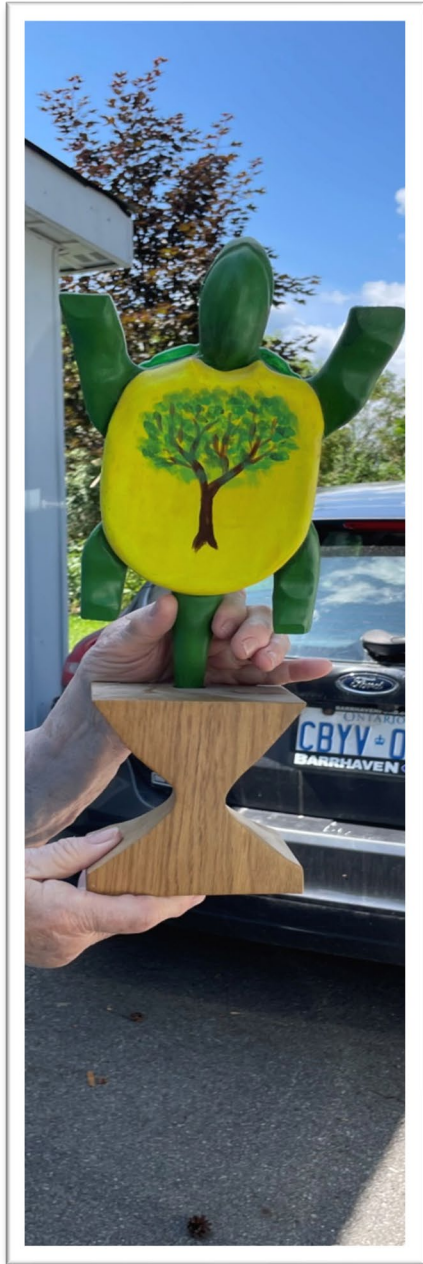


Indigenous Man with Wolf, 2014

Basswood hand carving of an Indigenous man with wolf in natural color. Height 36 cm.



Ceremonial Aboriginal Turtle Rattle, front view; height 32 cm.



Ceremonial Aboriginal Turtle Rattle, back view

Humorous themes



"Going to" and "Coming from" Tucson's Bar, 1997

Rick with two prize-winning humorous and whimsical hand carvings in his studio. Crowd favorites are "Oh Buzz Off", "Time Out" and "What a Mess" (not shown).



Chicken Thief, 2005

Humorous painted basswood hand carving. First prize in exhibition.

Small and seasonal hand carved themes



Seasonal carvings

Changing themes over the years and seasons.

Studio and workshop



Rick's In-House Studio Workshop Table, 2023

Rick St. John's work bench, tools and vent for the home-made dust collection machine are centrally located with some of his smaller carvings on the shelves. Notice the exterior buildings through the west window, where his outside studio once was. Rick is using the technique of pyrography on the carved owl in the foreground.



Rick's Studio Wall, 2023 (partial east wall)

Rick's shelves are lined with his daughter's baton twirling trophies, his champion beagle awards and trophies, as well as professional carving books. His library also includes reference books to research his many and various interests.



Rick's Studio Wall, 2023 (partial east wall)

The wall features Indigenous artifacts, feathers, and a pouch. His outdoor clothing and signature hats are also visible. In the top-right corner are hunting trophies and a collection of Rick's handmade fishing jigs.



Partial west wall view and corner of south wall

Every corner of Rick's studio is filled with his own carvings and other collections.

Rick's original basswood demonstration models



Indigenous person



Chickadee, front and top views



Rick and Rita St. John in Rick's Carving Studio, 2023

South wall with fireplace, prize ribbons and collected face masks in background. Rick continues to carve every day.

A sample of Rick's carving activities, demos, and exhibits, 1995 - 2024

1995, Ducks Unlimited Live Auction, Kemptville Committee, "What a Team!" original carving by Rick St. John, donated by artist.

1995, April 6, Conservation Dinner and Live Auction, Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, North Gower, Feature artists; original carving "Loon Mother" by Rick St. John and original painting "Predator - or Prey" by Reuben St. John. Donated by both artists.

1996, June 12, Rick St. John donated his original carved cardinal, called the "Kars Cardinal" to be raffled off in honor of Kars Public School's 50th anniversary.

1998 - 2004, Carp, Outaouais Wood Carvers (OWC) exhibits and carving demonstrations, esp. soap carving for children, Rick and Rita's specialty.

1995 - 1999 Ottawa Exhibition, OWC demonstrations, exhibits & photographs.

1999 - 2000 National Arts Centre, OWC Soap carving demonstrations and activities.

2000, Ducks Unlimited Live Auction, hand carved "Chickadee" by Rick St. John.

2000, May 27, National Arts Centre pre-concert activity for children (ages 5-13); demonstrating the art of woodcarving using soap.

2001, Nov 17-18, Canadian Museum of Nature, Art of Nature Festival, demonstrations and hands on craft activities, Rick and Rita St. John.

2003, March 11, Soap Carving with Rick & Rita St. John of the OWC at the Eastern Ontario Biodiversity Museum, Kemptville. The St. John's proceeds go to support their work for CHEO kids.

2003, October 2 - 31, Woodcarver Rick St. John displayed his artworks at the Nepean Museum, Ottawa, "Images of Nature in Wood", including 134 hand-carved pieces.

2005, June 10, National Capital Wildlife Festival, "Explore and Embrace a Special World", original carving donated by Rick St. John.

2006, June 23, National Capital Wildlife Festival, "Watersheds ...More than just water...Explore yours!". Awards for Excellence, original carving donated by Rick.

2011, December 11, Kars RA thanks Rick for providing his carvings as door prizes for the Kars Senior Luncheons.

2018, *Summer OWC Newsletter*, June 6 Meeting, photo of Rick with trophies for Best in Show and in the Open category.

2019, August 10, Heritage Artisan's Day, Dickinson House Museum, Manotick featuring woodcarving with Rick St. John and Kevin Burke.

2024, Spring, OWC demonstration and exhibition at Kars RA.



Rick has the attention of all, including Symphony Conductor Pinchas Zukerman, during a National Arts Centre pre-concert wood and soap carving activity, May 2000.

Credits

Written and researched by Ellen Adamsons. Research materials are from Rick St. John's collection of papers, news clippings, and photographs.

All photographs by Claire Sutton except the following: pages 1 and 6 by Lorne Whitty; pages 4, 5, 23, and 33 are from Rick St. John's collection.