



Gilmore, Nalda

Hunting Horn Maker

Nalda Gilmore lived in West Monroe, in Ouachita Parish. He began making hunting horns over forty-five years ago. Blowing horns were used to call hunting dogs and for communicating with other hunters. Mr. Gilmore used hunting horns for hunting with beagles.

As a young man, Gilmore learned to make blow horns from the late V.A. Capers of West Monroe, a master blowing horn maker. They worked together and perfected the craft. Nalda has been making hunting horns ever since. He said, "I never cease to love making horns."

Gilmore made cattle and goat horns, which he bought in bulk "in the rough." Cattle horns are slightly curved and smooth, and goat horns are ridged and spiral-shaped. Ideally, he said, "You look for a long, clean, pretty form with a tapered neck for making a blowing horn." The horn can be tuned by sawing it off to different lengths.

When making a blowing horn, Mr. Gilmore waited for the bony substance at the base of the horn to slide out naturally, leaving the horn hollow. A drill bit was then used to bore a hole in the horn's tip. Next, a mouthpiece about two and a half inches long would then be added; Mr. Gilmore made three different kinds of mouthpieces for his blowing horns. He added what he calls a "turn-around," another piece of horn, to the tip or attach a fiberglass mouth. The mouthpiece can also be part of the hunting horn itself.

The rest, he said, "is cosmetic." The horn was sanded on three belts and then buffed with a polishing compound similar to jewelers' rouge so that the natural beauty of the horn could show. He commented, "Even a horn that looks unremarkable in the rough can become beautiful as it is worked on, and the more you sand it, the prettier it looks." The colors in the polished horn come from the pigment of the animal's hide, he explained. Nalda also made power horns as well as a distinctive horn covered in deer hide. In addition to blowing horns, he and his wife used scrap pieces of horn to make articles such as shoehorns, earrings, keychains, thimbles, necklaces, barrettes, and key chains. His wife and daughters added paint and scrimshaw to some of the crafts. They also used the powder from the horns to fertilize the garden.

Mr. Gilmore participated in craft shows and festivals such as the Louisiana Folklife Festival in Monroe and the Natchitoches/NSU Folk Festival. His demonstrations included horns in various stages of preparation so that visitors could see each step. Mr. Gilmore died October 3, 2004.

Updated January 19, 2017 by Natchitoches-NSU Folklife Center Staff