

# WOODWORKER'S JOURNAL

"America's leading woodworking authority"™

## Classic Project



### In this plan you'll find:

- Step-by-step construction instruction.
- A complete bill of materials.
- Construction drawings and related photos.
- Tips to help you complete the project and become a better woodworker.

## Christmas Angel Folk Carving

GIFT SHOP Easy-To-Make Gift Projects

### Christmas Angel Folk Carving

By Rick and Ellen Bütz

The angel has been a favorite woodcarving subject for several hundred years. In early America, carved angels like the one shown here were often seen in the form of weathervanes. Frequently they were placed atop church steeples, where they were considered more appropriate than secular subjects like horses and grasshoppers.

Historically, angels have been regarded as heavenly messengers. They appear several times in the story of the Nativity. Today they symbolize for us the joyous spirit of Christmas, bearing its message of Peace and Hope.

This project is an example of shallow relief carving where a silhouette shape is rounded and then detailed. I have listed the tools that I use on this woodcarving as a guide. But don't feel that you must have exactly the same tools as those listed to make the carving. Tools of similar size and shape can be substituted. And it is even possible to do the carving with just a knife, although it will take longer.

To begin, use our full-size pattern to trace the design onto a piece of 3/4 in. thick by 5 in. wide by 13 in. long basswood. Be sure to lay the pattern out so that the grain runs the length of the angel. This will provide strength for the delicate parts like the horn and feet.

Next, cut out the profile with a band saw or coping saw. Then drill two 1/4 in. holes through the openings on each side of the arms. This allows you to put the blade of a coping saw through



Photo 1



Published in *Woodworker's Journal* November/December 1990



To download these plans, you will need **Adobe Reader** installed on your computer. If you want to get a free copy, visit: <http://adobe.com/reader>.

### Having trouble downloading the plans?

Right click on the download link and select "Save Target As..." or "Save Link As..." (depending on the web browser you are using) to download to your local drive.

Copyright *Woodworker's Journal* © 2010  
This pattern is copyrighted by *Woodworker's Journal*.  
Purchasers of this plan may make three copies for personal use in the shop. The pattern itself, however, is the property of *Woodworker's Journal* and is not to be reproduced for distribution or resale. Doing so, including via any electronic methods, is a violation of copyright law.

# Christmas Angel Folk Carving

By Rick and Ellen Bütz

The angel has been a favorite woodcarving subject for several hundred years. In early America, carved angels like the one shown here were often seen in the form of weathervanes. Frequently they were placed atop church steeples, where they were considered more appropriate than secular subjects like horses and grasshoppers.

Historically, angels have been regarded as heavenly messengers. They appear several times in the story of the Nativity. Today they symbolize for us the joyous spirit of Christmas, bearing its message of Peace and Hope.

This project is an example of shallow relief carving where a silhouette shape is rounded and then detailed. I have listed the tools that I use on this woodcarving as a guide. But don't feel that you must have exactly the same tools as those listed to make the carving. Tools of similar size and shape can be substituted. And it is even possible to do the carving with just a knife, although it will take longer.

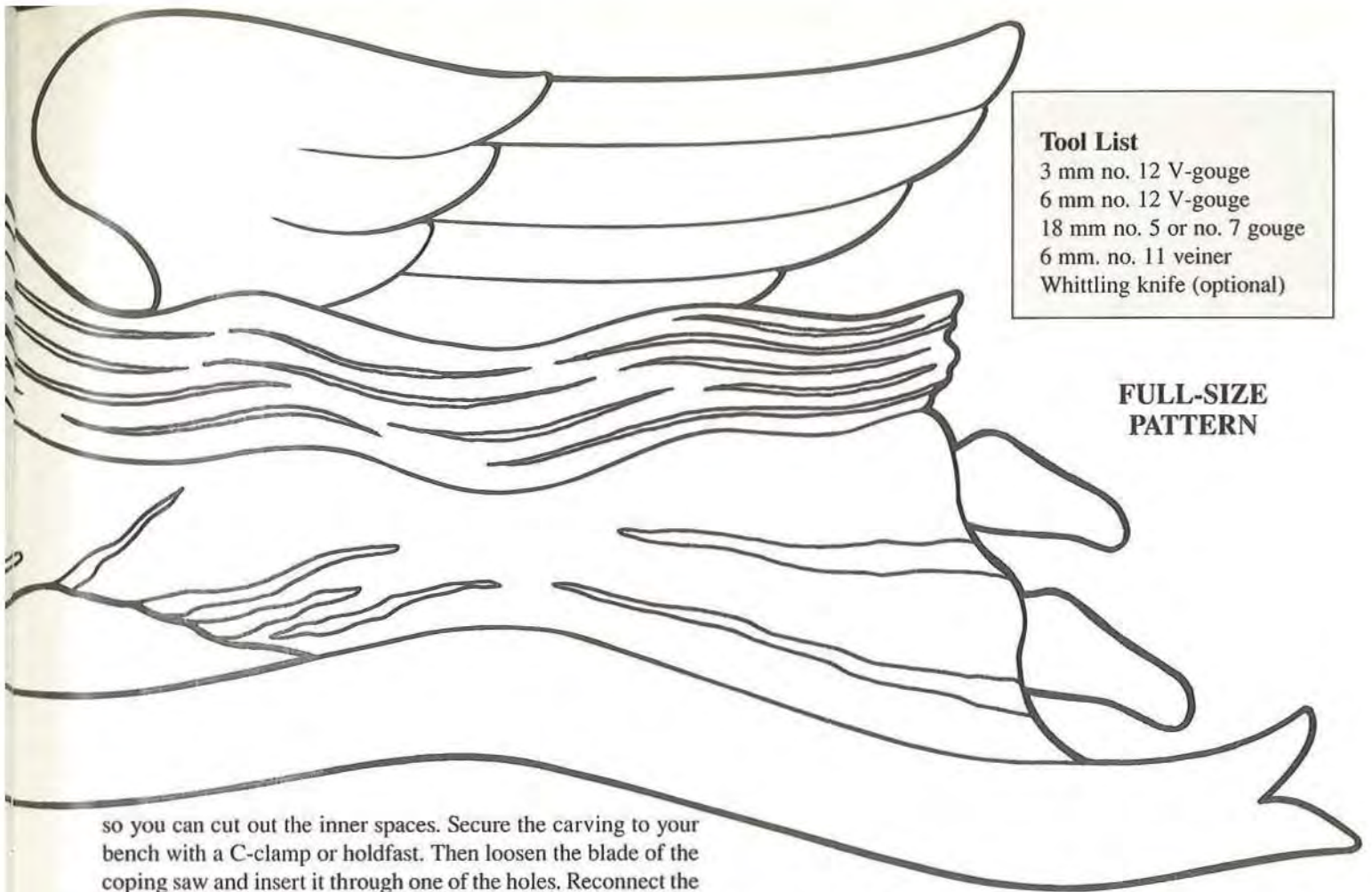
To begin, use our full-size pattern to trace the design onto a piece of  $\frac{3}{4}$  in. thick by 5 in. wide by 13 in. long basswood. Be sure to lay the pattern out so that the grain runs the length of the angel. This will provide strength for the delicate parts like the horn and feet.

Next, cut out the profile with a band saw or coping saw. Then drill two  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. holes through the openings on each side of the arms. This allows you to put the blade of a coping saw through



Photo 1





**Tool List**  
 3 mm no. 12 V-gouge  
 6 mm no. 12 V-gouge  
 18 mm no. 5 or no. 7 gouge  
 6 mm. no. 11 veiner  
 Whittling knife (optional)

**FULL-SIZE  
 PATTERN**

so you can cut out the inner spaces. Secure the carving to your bench with a C-clamp or holdfast. Then loosen the blade of the coping saw and insert it through one of the holes. Reconnect the blade to the saw and cut out the excess wood around the arms (Photo 1).

Start carving by outlining the hair, banner, and feet with a 6 mm no. 12 V-gouge (Photo 2). Make the cuts about 1/8 in. in depth. You may have to make more than one pass with the V-gouge to do this.

Next, bevel down the wing to the level of the V-cut with an 18 mm no. 5 or no. 7 gouge, leaving the hair raised (Photo 3). At this stage remember that you are just establishing the basic levels of the carving, and the detailing will be done later. Then bevel down the robes, leaving the banner raised (Photo 4).

Bevel down the sleeve area to the banner in the same way. Be sure to leave the hand area raised.

Outline the sleeve opening with the 6 mm V-gouge (Photo 5). Bevel the wrist down to the cut with the 18 mm no. 7 gouge (Photo 6). Outline the bottom edge of the wrist with the



*Photo 2*



*Photo 3*



*Photo 4*



*Photo 5*

V-gouge. Carve away the wood inside the sleeve with the 18 mm no. 7 gouge (Photo 7). These steps can be repeated if necessary to take the wood down in stages to the depth you want. A whittling knife with a small, sharp blade may also be helpful for carving the lower wrist and sleeve area.



*Photo 6*



*Photo 7*



*Photo 8*



*Photo 9*

Next, outline around the hand and in front of the lips with the V-gouge (Photo 8). Be sure not to cut too close to the face at this point. You want to leave enough wood for detailing the lips later. Now round the horn (Photo 9). You can use the same 18 mm no. 5 gouge or the no. 7 gouge to do this, but if you have a flatter gouge, like a no. 3, it will leave smoother cuts. Because the section of the horn in front of the face is small and delicate, you can use a smaller gouge or even a knife to round it.

After the horn is rounded, redraw the lines for the opening of the horn. Then use the V-gouge to outline the opening. Make the cut deeper in the middle than at the outside edges. Bevel away the excess wood inside the horn opening with the no. 7



*Photo 10*

gouge (Photo 10). In tight areas you can use just the corner of the tool to make the cuts; it functions almost like a knife point.

When the horn is shaped, round the hand with the no. 7 gouge. Remember, this is a folk carving, so don't worry about putting a lot of detail into the shape of the hand. Once again, the corner of the tool is useful for the tight areas where the hand



*Photo 11*

joins the horn. Then carve three shallow lines with the V-gouge to suggest fingers (Photo 11).

Begin the head by slightly rounding the face with the no. 7 gouge. Use the same tool to round the hair at the top of the head (Photo 12). Use the V-gouge to make a shallow line for the hairline.



*Photo 12*

To shape the face use a 6 mm no. 11 veiner. This is a "U" shaped tool that was originally designed to carve the veins in Gothic-style leaves centuries ago. I use a veiner for these cuts rather than a V-gouge to give the soft, rounded contours representative of a female face.

Make a shallow, rounded notch where the eye will be placed. Leave the upper part of the cheek high and rounded. This makes it look as though the angel's cheeks are puffed out blowing the



*Photo 13*

horn. I've found the secret to carving faces is to remove the wood with many small shallow cuts rather than one large one (Photo 13).

Next, use the veiner to carve an arc around the front of the cheek to define the nose and lips (Photo 14). To detail the mouth and eyelids use a 3 mm no. 12 V-gouge (Photo 15). Once again, remove only tiny amounts of wood at a time.

Use the veiner to carve away wood below the jaw line to shape the neck. Use a V-gouge to incise a line creating the neckline of the robe (Photo 16).



**Photo 14**



**Photo 15**



**Photo 16**

Contour the banner with the no. 7 gouge. This is an optional step and simply involves making the banner lower in one or two places to give the impression that it is flowing in the wind.



**Photo 17**



**Photo 18**

Be careful as you carve the hollows to work with the direction of the wood grain. If the wood begins to splinter and you feel the tool "dig in," stop carving and approach the cut from the opposite direction (Photo 17). Then, with the same tool, bevel down and shape the slippers.

Now use the 6 mm V-gouge to create the hair texture, following the wavy contours. The hair will look more natural if you don't try to make your cuts too precise. Then outline the feathers on the wing (Photo 18).

The next step is to make the folds in the robe. I always draw them on with a pencil first. Make the lines slightly curved to enhance the flowing feeling of the robe. Don't draw in too many folds, you can always add more later. Then use the no. 11 veiner to carve the folds. The "U" shape will create a soft texture that looks like cloth (Photo 19).

Now the angel is ready to paint.

You can also use spray lacquer. This keeps the water-based acrylic paint I use on this carving from soaking too deeply into the basswood. For



**Photo 19**

working with acrylic I like white sable brushes. Synthetic bristles do not soften in water the way natural sable bristles do. Also, the acrylic paint washes out of sable brushes easily. Acrylic paints and sable brushes are available at art supply shops.

You can paint your angel any colors you like, but these are the ones I use. The flesh tone is titanium white with a tiny bit of burnt sienna. The robe is straight titanium white. The wing is cadmium red medium and titanium white. The hair is cadmium yellow medium lightened slightly with titanium white. The banner is ultramarine blue and titanium white. The horn and slippers are painted gold.

After the paint has dried, you can glaze the angel to give it an antique look. In the glazing process, you brush a coat of stain over the carving and then quickly wipe it off. This leaves a trace of stain in the depressions of the carving, softening the colors



**Photo 20**

and giving the angel a slightly weathered look, like a piece of Early American folk art.

Before you stain the carving, brush a coat of boiled linseed oil over the surface and wipe off the excess. The thin film of oil remaining on the carving will make it easier to control the amount of stain you leave on the carving. Then brush on a coat of dark oil-based stain. I use Minwax Special Walnut. Use a clean lint-free cloth to wipe the stain off (Photo 20).

To display your angel, simply screw a small screw eye into the top edge of the wing, and hang it on a wall or doorway. This woodcarving makes a very attractive decoration or heirloom gift of the season.

