

Carving A Leprechaun
James River Wood Carvers Mini Workshop Project On Zoom
John Nolin
March 4, 2021

Two patterns are available for you to choose from.

One is in the current issue of Woodcarving Illustrated, Spring 2021, Issue 94. Carved example not yet completed. A band sawed cutout is used.

The other has been adapted by John Nolin from Carving Magazine, Issue #13, Spring 2006, by the late Lynn Diel (5-18-54 – 1-16-2013). That magazine has been out of business for several years, and the author passed away nearly a decade ago. Due to copyright restrictions the club cannot post this article on our website without permission and has no way to obtain permission. It is unlikely that many of our members will have access to the original magazine, For that reason, John has digitized the article, and will share it with any club member who requests it on a personal basis (contact him via e-mail at jnolin59@yahoo.com). This will probably not be necessary for most of you, since the following instructions and photos based on the article should be sufficient.

A few words of advice based on what was learned during the carving process--

The hat is difficult, due in part to the brim being entirely cross the grain, and once it has been carved above and below it will be very breakable while holding. The original instructions (which I followed) protect against breakage by making the brim too thick at first and only at the end thinning the brim to a more hat-like look, and by delaying rounding off the corners until late in the process. Since the shape of the hat is critical to how the head is shaped, it would be better to carve the hat to nearly final shape at the beginning. Also, for no good reason I could see, the hat is initially much too tall like an Abe Lincoln top hat, and then has to be carved off (sloping to the back) by about 1/4" - 3/8". Not covered in the original directions, near the end of the carving process while tapering the crown, you will need to thin the brim all the way back from the edge to where it joins the crown, not just tapering the thickness down to the edge.

The arms were originally too wide, 5/8" from shoulder to cuff. On the second carving this is reduced to 1/2" and looks much better. The original instructions called for use of a #7 – 5/8" gouge to form the top of the shoulders. That works pretty well with the 5/8 arms, and ok with the 1/2 arms, but if you don't have this gouge, just use your carving knife.

You will have a tendency to make too shallow cuts. This can result in too much squareness, and the face especially will have a bulldog jaw.

Do not expect your leprechaun to look cheerful. When you find a leprechaun at his treasure of gold, you will either take the gold or the leprechaun must give you a wish, neither option making him happy.

Supplies and Tools Used:

Basswood, 1.5" x 1.5" x 6". Richmond Woodcraft has this in stock in 12" pieces for \$3.99.

Carving knife, 1 3/4" blade very sharp.

V tool, Flexcut 45 degree, and Dockyard 2 mm.

Gouges #7 sweep 5/8", and Dockyard 2 mm.

Detail Knives, straight blade and curved blade.

Ruler, 6" flexible clear plastic, #2 pencil, small 90 degree try square, and a US quarter.

220 sandpaper

Safety glove.

Blue Dawn detergent

Boiled Linseed Oil

Acrylic paints – Kelly Green, Titanium white, Black, Iron oxide, Flesh, Bright gold, clear matte polyurethane varnish.

Steps to carving the Leprechaun, numbers are keyed to photos which illustrate carving progress [cross references to Carving Magazine steps are shown in brackets]:

Photos 1, 2, 3, and 4. [1, 2, 4, 5, 6] Mark the initial landmarks as shown lightly in pencil.

On photo 1, the front, come down from the top 1" (can be 3/4" on a 5 3/4" block) and draw a line square across; this is the top of the hat brim. Come down 3/16" and draw another line parallel this is the bottom of the hat/ top of the face. From the bottom of the block, come up 1 1/4" and draw a line square across, this is the top of the strongbox/bottom of the feet. From the bottom of the feet, come up 5/8" and draw a line square across, this is the top of the shoes. Centered in the middle are two parallel vertical lines 3/16" apart between the hat brim and the shoes.

On photo 2, the right side, where it joins the front connect to the 1" down line and draw to the rear corner at 1 1/8" down, this is the top of the hat brim slightly slanted. Back from the front corner 5/8" draw a vertical line from the bottom of the hat brim to a point even with the line on the front for top of shoes. Draw corresponding lines on the left side of the block.

Photo 3, the back, draw lines connecting the lines on both sides for the hat brim and the bottom of the shoes.

Photo 4, the top. Draw lines 1/4" in and parallel to each of the four sides, and extend each of those lines down the sides to the top of the hat brim lines. Center a quarter coin on the top and draw a circle around it, thus marking the top of the hat crown.

Photo 5. [7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13] This shows completion of these carving steps:

At each corner, make a stop cut at the top of the hat brim from one 1/4" vertical line to the other. Remember that the brim slants on the sides but is straight across front and back. From about 1/4" above the stop cut at each corner cut out a wedge. This gives you a starting point which will partly protect the wood of the brim. Continue the stop cut at the top of the brim between the corners nearly 1/4" deep. Now remove the wood from the top of the brim up to the circle on top, creating a cylinder.

Make a stop cut below the hat brim at each front corner, and remove a small wedge. Be careful not to break off a corner of the hat brim. Now make a stop cut at each front corner at the top of shoes line, then remove small wedge. From these four starting points, you will carve off the triangular areas back to the vertical lines in the center of front and on the sides. Be aware of the wood grain so you have smooth cuts without tear outs and nicely flat surfaces.

Photo 6. [14, 15] Shows new landmarks to be penciled on each side.

The line for hair line and top of shoulder is 5/8" down from bottom of brim at back corner, and goes squarely to the front. The point of the elbow is at the back corner and 3 1/4" up from bottom of the block, and a line is drawn across the back side connecting these two points. The back of the arm is a line from 1/8" forward of the back corner on the top of shoulder line, down to the elbow point. A line goes across the side from the elbow point to a point 2 7/8" up from the bottom of the block and 5/8" back from the front. The front of the arm is 1/2" from the back of the arm down to the bend at elbow.

The sleeve cuff is at 90 degrees from where the lower sleeve mark ends at 5/8" from the front.

Photo 7 and 8. [14, 15] Shows landmark lines from front and back views.

Photo 9, 10, and 11. [16, 17, 18, 19] Shows front, side, and back views carved.

Draw a hair line across the back, connecting to the hair line/shoulder lines on each back corner. Mark about the same distance down on the narrow strip at the front. At each back corner hair line, on the back and on the side draw a line up at an angle to the bottom of the brim to where the line appears to enter the crown of the hat. At the front of the shoulders, draw a similar line up across the carved slope.

Carve away the wood on the sides and back in slopes from the hairlines to the underside of the brim. Carve a similar slope at the front, from the mark on the narrow strip (which you drew even with the side hairlines) to a point under the brim which would continue to just before the crown of the hat. Now draw the two parallel lines back on the front slope. Now you will carve a small wedge away from each of the two parallel lines to where the side slope begins, from the bottom of the brim down to a line even with the side hairlines. This creates a 90 degree angle with a center ridge where the face will be carved.

Photo 12, 13. [20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 49, 50] Shows drawing for face and beard, face features carved. On the narrow ridge at front, come down 3/16" from bottom of hat brim and mark for top of eyes. Mark a second line 1/4" below that line and 1/4" wide for bottom of nose. Make stop cut 1/8" deep perpendicular to the bridge of the nose (not perpendicular to block) on first mark. Make another 1/8" stop cut perpendicular to bottom of nose at second mark.

Using knife point, stab cut connecting top line to base of nose, with knife tip slightly leaned away from nose to not undercut nose. This will have the nose flare out from bridge to lower sides of nose. With tip of knife remove a small wedge between side of nose and eye brow line, also forming eyes and cheeks.

To complete forming the nose, remove a wedge of the narrow strip below the nose to the 1/8" deep cut. Be careful not to cut off the nose. Slice off a very small wedge from the base of the nose up to the brow on each side to give the nose a good shape.

Photo 13, 13a, 13b, 13c, 13d, 13e, 14. [25, 26, 27, 28, 29] Draw in the landmarks for side of face, mouth, smile lines, and bottom of beard, as shown in photo 13. Note how the line curves inward and back outward in the temple area. With narrow angle v-tool, remove these lines, tilting the v away from the face as you cut.

Draw landmarks for the coat. Start a curved line about midway on the side of the beard down to about 1/8" above the sleeve cuff. Draw a slightly curved line from about 1/8" above and forward of the top of each cuff across the belly to mark the top of the pants. Below the sleeve, continue the curved coat line to the back corner about midway between shoe top and knee level. Make perpendicular top cuts about 1/16" deep from shoulder down both sides of arm to cuff, then along coat front lines, then across bottom of beard from shoulder cut to coat cut and across the top of the pants.

Remove some wood above the pants top up to the beard and the coat lines, you will want to shape this area later to make it look right. Now remove some wood from the area of the coat above the sleeve, and from below the sleeve to the back corners.

Photo 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21 [30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38]. Mark $2\frac{3}{4}$ " above the bottom of the block on the narrow center strip to mark the top of the inside leg of the pants. Draw diagonal lines from the ends of this mark down to the bottom back of the sloped areas carved out earlier. Make a stop cut at the mark for top of shoes, deepest at the center strip. Remove the wood from straight across the top of shoes in a wedge up to the inside leg mark. Now carve off some of the center wood from the inside leg mark upward to the top of the pants to allow more roundness of the belly without too big a pot-belly. Round the pant legs downward to center and sides. Be careful to allow for the pockets which have hands in them.

Mark the tops of the feet, and from the center between the feet draw a line upward to a point $2\frac{3}{4}$ " above the bottom of the block. From that point, draw short lines toward the middle of each cuff. With the v-tool, remove these lines, deepening as necessary to define the front of the legs.

Draw arcs across the front of the shoes. Using these and the marks on the tops of feet, carve out the shoes back to the pants legs.

At the bottom of the arm, where you made a stop cut previously, take out a small wedge to look like the coat is going under the arm, then smooth that cut down into the body of the coat.

Photo 22, 23 [36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55]. On the back, mark the arms. From the elbow point, draw a mark inward $\frac{3}{16}$ ", then downward to the bottom of the feet. Continue the line between the elbows across the back. Mark the bottom of the coat as a gentle curve between the sides.

Stop cut at the base of the feet, $\frac{3}{16}$ " deep at back corner of side and tapering to about $\frac{1}{2}$ way forward, and across the back. Now draw a line for the bottom of the pant legs from the top of the shoe where the pants hit to the back about $\frac{1}{8}$ " up from the bottom of the shoe heels. With v-tool remove this line to outline the pants, tilting the tool away from the pants. Remove the wedge from the stop cut at the sole to the pants line to form the back of the shoes.

Using the two vertical lines on the back below the elbow points to guide, carve off the corners of the coat and pants. With v-tool, carve the bottom of the coat. Use v-tool to carve the area between the legs and shoes up to the bottom of the coat, and round the pant legs with knife.

Carve the hair area all around to eliminate squareness and be sure the head looks like it goes into the hat, rather than the hat being too small and perching above the head.

Slightly round the edges of the waist band, coat, and sleeves. Remove a small sliver to show the bottom of the sleeve cuff and pocket opening.

Using a #7 – $\frac{5}{8}$ " gouge (or $\frac{1}{2}$ ", or your knife) make a stop cut slightly sloping upward from the outside to the neck and hair on each side. Then remove the wood above the stop cuts to the hair.

Across the back, draw a curved line to connect the hair lines on the sides. With v-tool, cut out that line. Now cut out the wood from the elbows up to the hair, sloping from the elbow to $\frac{1}{8}$ " in at the hairline. Carve off the corners of the hair at the back. Mark the back of the arms by drawing a gently curved line upwards from the inside of each elbow to points about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the way in from the corner and about $\frac{3}{8}$ " down from the hairline. With v-tool, take out these lines. Carve out the wood between the arms from a little below the elbow line up to the neck and around the base of the neck.

The leprechaun has his arms a bit pulled back.

Photo 23, 24,25,26, 27. [51, 52, 53,54,55]. If you have not already done so, you now need to finish the hat. Draw a circle around the top of the brim, maintaining the same distance from the crown as the center of each side. Carefully carve this off.

Decide how tall you want the crown of the hat, and mark that. From front to back, the top should slope about $3/16''$ to $1/4''$. Carve off the excess. Now you will taper the crown from the brim to the top by about $1/8''$ all around (the taper may be more or less depending on the height you chose). The brim is too thick to look good, so you should pare off some of it on a slope from the crown to the edge of the brim. Be careful in thinning near the edge, as it can easily break along a grain; using sandpaper on that part may be a better idea.

You can have your leprechaun standing on whatever you choose to carve. My first one stands on a stack of gold bars, and my second one on a strong box.

Go over your carving very carefully to smooth any rough spots, awkward corners, or fuzzies, before signing and dating, coating with boiled linseed oil, and after it dries painting it and applying a protective coat of matte or satin polyurethane varnish.

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