

The following was presented by a Board Member at the Hall of Distinction Induction Ceremony of the Dover Historical Society, April 2014.

Ernest “Mooney” Warther

Ernest “Mooney” Warther was born in Dover on October 30, 1885. Forced to grow up quickly when his father passed away, Mooney quit school after second grade. To help the family’s financial situation, he began herding cows for a penny a day. It was during these early years that a chance encounter with a hobo changed Mooney’s life. The hobo taught him to carve a pair of pliers using a single piece of wood. Later, in 1913, Warther carved a “pliers” tree. It took over two months to complete, requiring 31,000 cuts, and created 511 working pliers. The “pliers” tree was displayed at the 1933 World’s Fair in Chicago.

At the age of 14, Warther began his first full-time job at the American Sheet and Tin Plate Company. Initially he was a scrap bundler but worked his way up to become the head shears man. It was during this time in the mill that Mooney began to make knives. Today, the Warther family continues the tradition, making some of the finest knives in the world.

In 1910 Mooney married Frieda Richard. The couple bought a modest home and in 1912, a workshop followed. Mooney quit whittling and started carving. His subject in those early years was a series of locomotives depicting the History of Steam. This collection grew to include 65 carvings including his masterpiece, The Great Northern Locomotive, which he carved in 1933.

In 1923, thanks to the New York Central Railroad, Mooney travelled the country for six months, and spent time displaying his trains at Grand Central Station in New York. The opening of a small museum in 1936 followed, providing for Mooney’s most productive years. Today that small museum has grown to become one of the premiere museums in Ohio.

Although Mooney retired in 1953, he began carving again in 1957. His son Dave suggested he focus on the great events in American railroad history. This collection saw nine new carvings, including his Lincoln Funeral Train. Ernest “Mooney” Warther died in 1973 at age 87.