



**"Well done is better than well said."** ~Benjamin Franklin, {lived out by Bill Neill}

Many people today have hobbies. Running, knitting, reading. However not many people have a true craft, a skill. Clarence William Neill, known in these parts as Bill, has a true gift and skill with chip carving.

Bill was born May 6, 1934. He spent his life as a glazer, working with glass for Wildwood Glass and then later for the union. He worked on many of the hotels, motels and buildings from here to Philadelphia, including the glass on Philadelphia skyscrapers, and the mirrors on the Hamilton Mall Macy's. He built his own house, and has grown up in North Wildwood and has lived in Cape May County his whole life.

Bill met his wife when he was out one evening, and he noticed her standing with one of her friends. They had many things in common, from chess playing to being part of large families. Bill is number 10 of 11 children, and Eleanor number 8 of 18 children. They married in 1953, and have a happy life together.

He continued working as a glazer until he developed cancer of the esophagus in the early 1990's. After going through treatments, Bill's doctor kept shaking his hand and saying "You are one lucky fella," and lucky he was, since only 5% survive and live to be cancer free, Bill being one of them. He retired from glazing soon after. Bill always enjoyed his job, but saved his creativity and passion for his hobbies.

Growing up, he loved chess playing. Bill has always been self taught- he got himself several books on chess playing, and learned from them and through playing other people. He entered competitions, and won several trophies for his skills. His wife Eleanor also was a chess player, and they have black and white photos of their proud faces holding their trophies decorating the walls of their home. Bill taught a chess class at Cape May County Tech for several years, and still is active in the chess club at Lower Regional school.

Their home is a wonderful tribute to Bill's skills at his other passion, chip carving. His entire house is adorned with his practice and completed pieces of woodworking. He started small, with napkin holders. Over a period of 18 years, Bill worked up to an 8 by 4 foot sign he made for a church, and a wonderful toy chest he carved for his great granddaughter. Throughout his house you notice his work- napkin holders, a different design carved into each side. Magazine holders, trash cans. Quilt rack, music box, jewelry box, sewing table, and bigger items like a chimney cabinet and deacon bench. In his yard he built a wishing well and lighthouse. Everywhere is evidence of his careful, detailed wood working skill.

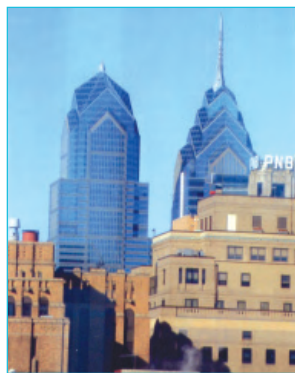


## Bill Neill

BY JESSICA WESTERLAND



Bill & Eleanor at their home in CMCH, NJ



Bill worked as a glazer on these formidable Philadelphia skyscrapers



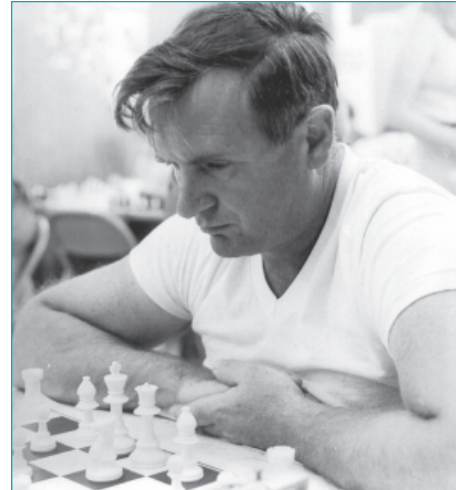
Bill in his workshop holding a sign he hand-carved of one of his favorite 'SUN' quotes, that he presented as a gift which was proudly hung in our Sun by-the-sea office.



Bill with a fine sampling of his workmanship that he made especially for his great granddaughter



Bill & Eleanor with their Chess trophies. Bill taught Chess at the CMC Vo Tech high school and is a local Chess Champion of Cape May County.



He began chip carving when he retired, in the early 1990's. He came home with a book, just like with chess and followed directions. He bought the tools it told you to, sketched out the patterns, and tried out the techniques. "You get a book, and they tell you what knives to get, and how to sharpen, and how to hold the knife. Then they give you patterns, and tell you how to do it." The funny thing is he can learn anything from a book and teach himself, but teaching others is much more difficult.

He took a liking to it, and continued, moving on to more and more complex items. His workshop is a homey shed, the walls filled with glass jars containing screws, nuts, bolts, and other odds and ends. Each tool is neatly hung on their nails, and carvings and other plaques and small projects are displayed on the walls. There are books and neatly labeled drawers under the work tables and boards, chunks and scraps of wood piled in every corner. The whole shop is covered in a perpetual layer of wood dust. He works with mostly pine, but also balsa and sassafras. Bill doesn't have any particular themes, but does a little bit of everything, from carved animals, nautical objects, Irish and patriotic sayings, to rosettes.

One of the most wonderful things about Bill's skill as a chip carver, is that he is not selfish. He makes pieces for people he knows, and sells some pieces occasionally. His work can be found in the Middle Township Community Center, where he has several ornate sign boards throughout the building, and also the large welcome sign for a church in Elwood NJ. He doesn't just work on projects and objects useful for himself, but he expands his skill and makes items for his house and wife.

Another wonderful thing about his work is that while it looks professionally done, when you look closely at it, it has the feel and appearance of something handmade, something labored over, something someone put care and attention into. You can see the meticulous strokes that were hewed into the wood, like looking closely at a painting and seeing brush strokes. Bill and Eleanor's home feels very comfortable and personal, because so many parts of it are handmade and one of a kind.

Bill is a quiet, charming gentleman. He has a discernable calmness, that patient quality some people possess and other wish they did. This quality no doubt helped him acquire all these skills from books and stick with his hobbies until he really got the hang of it.

It isn't everyday you meet someone who is talented, skilled and also humble about it. When you meet someone who is amazing like that, they are not forgotten easily. Bill Neill is one of these people.