

## Basswood Uses in Arts and Crafts

The wood from basswood trees is fine grained and easy to carve. For that reason it has been used in many art and craft projects.

Walter Kuse used a basswood log to carve a life-sized Uncle Sam mailbox holder in the late 1920's. That figure has been restored and now stands at the doorway to the Kuse Farm Museum workroom.



**Carved Uncle Sam Figure Holding Mail Box  
Hildegard Kuse Playing Nearby**

Walter Kuse also used the wood to carve a nativity scene for the family in the 1930's.



Nativity Scene Carved from Basswood by Walter Kuse

### **Pyrography or Wood Burning**

Pyrography means “writing with fire” and was a type of craft done with a pointed metal tool that had been heated and used to burn a design into a soft, fine-grained wood, such as basswood or other material. It was especially popular around 1900 when boxes, picture frames and other objects were decorated with it. It was also known as pokerwork. By varying the shape and size of the tool used and the temperature, a great variety of effects could be produced.

Our grandfather, Joe Kuse, tried the technique by using a metal object heated in the wood stove. It was said that he used a “poker” to burn this design of a young woman into a board. It is not certain if the person in the picture was to represent our grandmother or was a “Gibson Girl,” so popular as a design motif at that time.



**Wood Burning Done Around 1900 by Joe Kuse**

Wood burning kits were sold in mail order catalogs and advertised in ladies' magazines.

Since basswood was used in making crates and cigar boxes, the wood recycled from these sources was often used as a possible inexpensive medium.

After electricity became available, electric "pens" with changeable tips were used to replace the tools that needed to be heated and reheated in a separate fire source.

### **Bibliography**

The Etsy Blog. History Lesson: The Art of Pyrography. Jeni Sandberg. <https://www.etsy.com/blog/en/2013/history-pyrography/> (Accessed February 28, 2014)