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**HIS TALENT UNDIMINISHED** at 79 years of age, William Archer, of Wicklow, self-taught violin maker, wood carver and painter, leads the life of a man 25 years junior. His violins, one of which he is holding in the lower right photo, are sought after by leading violinists in Canada as

well as by promising students. In the upper right photo is an example of his painting, which he began as a boy and his fine wood carving is demonstrated in the left photo which shows part of a desk, chair and magazine rack he has made.

—(Murray Smith Photos).



# Violin Maker, Wood Carver till Going Strong At 79

*b. 1875 d. 1960*

**COBOURG (ENS)**—From berry juice and home - compounded vegetable colors to professional pigments; from Marmora to Hollywood—thus reads the story of 79 year old William Archer of Wicklow—artist, woodcarver and maker of violins and cellos. William Archer, a versatile man, self-taught, is a born artist to whom learning came easy.

Tribute to his talent and industry, his home at Wicklow is a veritable museum of lovely oil paintings, exquisite hand-carved furniture, hand-made violins and cellos of matchless beauty and tone.

As for William Archer, himself, he is a man of 79 who looks much more like one in his early fifties. He has twinkling eyes, hair which the grey has invaded but slightly, ruddy, jolly complexion, and an active figure of a man that takes him yearly on deer hunting trips. Yes, and he always comes home with a deer.

#### **BORN AT DELORO**

William Archer was born at Deloro, in Marmora township, where his father worked with a gold mining company and also as a stone mason. Before he took up painting landscapes he followed the more commonplace occupation of decorator. However, as a boy he experimented for some time with colors, even resorting to berry juice for his pigments.

Then he tried compounding vegetable dyes and as his knowledge of art expanded, he purchased professional artists' colors. It was a natural love of art that moved him to seek more knowledge by experiment. In those days there was not much schooling to be had.

In the summer season children could attend school but the winter snows made classes impossible. He was about ten years old when he was experimenting with vegetable colors but later he started to buy his colors from an artist supply store in Toronto.

Behind Mr. Archer's work table, where he turns out perfect examples of violin craftsmanship, is an oil painting showing "Old Man's Rock" at Bancroft. He was a young man when he painted that picture in oils and he has captured faithfully the natural colors of that region. In fact the entire living room walls of his home at Wicklow are covered with oil paintings, some framed, some just as they came from his easel.

#### **BOTH CAME EARLY**

Painting and music came almost at once to this man of wide artistic tastes. At 14 years, he painted in oils and water colors and also played the euphonium. He was only 19 years old when he joined the 48th Highlanders of Toronto under John Slater.

It was when he was in Toronto, for some five years, that he also worked for the Heintzman piano company. While there he commenced to take a keen interest in woodworking. Incidentally, in his home are beautiful pieces of hand-carved furniture, a Spanish desk of intricate scroll-work being an outstanding example of his skill.

When he returned to Marmora he went to work with the Deloro Smelting and Refining Company. The manager, S. B. Wright, was an accomplished musician and so pleased was he with Mr. Archer's expert repair work on violins used in the orchestra Mr. Wright conducted, that he persuaded him to expand his repair work into actual manufacture of violins.

Archer at that time played tenor trombone in Wright's symphony orchestra. Mr. Wright had been sending his violins to England for repairs but when he found that Archer could do such a fine job repairing them himself he entrusted him with his own instruments.

From a genuine Stradivari violin and also a Josef Guarneri instrument, owned by Wright, Archer planned his own model, carefully measuring the Strad and Guarneri violins for dimensions and thicknesses of the woods. For a time he used wood from old furniture he picked up here and there and later as his business grew he purchased the woods he needed from supply houses.

## SPRUCE, MAPLE, EBONY

He employed spruce, curly maple and imported ebony. The spruce went into the breast of the violin; from curly maple he fashioned the tail piece and finger board. Going into larger instruments and using the same wood, he made cellos.

A customer for his cellos is Leo Smith of the Toronto Symphony Orchestra. Nathan Green bought violins and violos from him. Frank Blatchford of the Royal Conservatory, was another enthusiastic customer. Braedas Farmer, well-known teacher of music in Toronto, has had 22 of Mr. Archer's violins for his pupils.

Mr. Archer was polishing with a soft cloth one of his favorite violin creations as he explained to The Examiner the art of conditioning the wood used in his instruments.

"Proper aging of the wood is very important," he said. "For instance wood that I put out to dry in 1917 is now being used in this present year. It takes about thirty-five years to dry the wood the way it should be. That means long slow curing of the wood. Kiln drying closes the pores of the wood and affects the tone. Wood," he said with a twinkle, "improves with age, like old wine."

He plucked the string of a superbly-finished violin of his creation. The tone was round, resonant and as it died away the sound seemed to linger somewhere deep in the heart of the instrument.

## "THAT IS TONE"

"That is tone. The wood has to be perfectly aged and slowly aged to produce that quality of tone. And as the violin grows older the tone will improve even more. Kiln-drying will not give you what you want. You can't improve on nature's own processes," Mr. Archer said.

To enlarge on Mr. Archer's musical background, it should be pointed out that in addition to playing with the 48th Highlanders, his musical career included playing with the 49th of Belleville, the 16th Battalion band of Picton; the I.O.O.F. band at Belleville and the 2nd Midland Regimental Band at Campbellford.

Among his talents was that of a craftsman in cabinet making. In fact it took him far afield—to Hollywood where he worked for some years with the Norman B. Milkran Company, who made sets for movie studios there and also personal furniture for the stars. In Mr. Archer's own home at Wicklow is a Spanish desk that could grace any Hollywood mansion.

And so, though 73 years of age, William Archer still creates beautiful things in wood, paints lovely oils and fashions violins which are eagerly sought after by people high in the musical world. And believe it or not, he drops his paint brush, and his wood tools, every fall to go hunting. An artist in the fullest sense of the word with the health and stability that comes to the man who also hunts.