

I had a great time this weekend at the *Franklin Institute* which is a museum in downtown Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; <https://www.fi.edu/> . The wood turning club I belong to, the **First State Woodturners** hosted a wood display and woodturning demonstration at the Franklin Institute's opening day for their new 'Vikings' exhibit. There were four of us who took turns turning Spinning Tops on a small Vicmarc lathe. To prepare for the event, I spent Friday afternoon cutting blocks of Grey Birch (*Betula populifolia*) and then turning them round so they would be easier to mount to the lathe to turn into spinning tops. Birch is one of the few hard woods that grew in the region that Vikings came from. Grey Birch is native to Maryland where I live but unfortunately is not to the area in Europe the Vikings came from. So we just told people visiting the clubs display that the wood was Birch which was a species the Vikings used. I pulled out wood samples from my collection to ensure we had a display of the actual species the Vikings had available to them in the Scandinavian area. They are in the light colored woods on the front right corner of the table in Figure 1. You can see the stand of IWCS pamphlets in the center of the table. We handed out quite a few pamphlets out during the day and had several people express interest in joining the IWCS.



*Figure 1 - Wood Display & Turning Demonstration*

The above picture, showing the entire display was taken before the museum opened, so it was pretty quiet. I spent my time, when not turning, standing by the wood sample display talking to people about the different wood species in the display and on the table.



*Figure 2 - Eric L. Krum Turning a Spinning Top*

In figure 2, I am turning a Spinning Top. Joe Nestlerode is standing to my left behind the table with the turning club information. Jeff Turi standing to Joe's left is at the wood display table.

During one of the times at the lathe, I had one little girl watching me put in a new block of Birch in the lathe to turn a Spinning Top. So I asked her, "Should I make a Flying Saucer or Onion shaped Top?" She responded that I should make an onion shaped Top, so I did. I handed the completed top to her and asked her to give it a spin. She did and the Top spun real well. She then went to put the Top in the bowl we were using for storage. When I told her to keep the Top as she had designed it, the look of joy on her face was priceless.



*Figure 3 - Eric Handing Young Man a Top*

She was just one of many kids who walked away happy with a Spinning Top. We could not make them fast enough.



*Figure 4 - Jeff Turi Just Finished a Spinning Top*

In Figure 4, Jeff Turi the First State Woodturners President has just cut free a finished Top. The Top is the light colored blur just right of his hand as it was flying off the lathe. The crowd in front of Jeff was typical, with people of all ages watching us making saw dust.

For the last 5 years I have hosted wood displays and turning demonstrations at different events and have developed a layout of different wood samples of unique woods that people find interesting. I have a round slice (cookie) from a log of Black Ironwood, *Krugiodendron ferreum*, about an inch thick from a tree in Florida that blew down in a hurricane. The Black Ironwood log was purchased several years ago at a Lake Yale wood auction. Black Ironwood is the heaviest wood in the world. Next to that is a much larger block of Balsa wood, *Ochroma pyramidale*, the lightest commercial wood in the world. I tell kids to pick up the Ironwood first and they are surprised at how heavy it is. Then they pick up the piece of Balsa. Most kids think it is also going to be heavy and since it is so much larger they end up picking it up and almost hit themselves in the face because it is so light. On Saturday, we went through this routine like a hundred times, it never gets old watching the look of surprise on the kids faces when they pick up the Balsa wood. There was one young man who grabbed the Balsa wood block with both of his hands and lifted the block of wood so hard it went over his head. I thought the kid's father was going to fall on the floor, he was laughing so hard.

Of the four of us, two had never done an event like this before and both said that they had a great time and that the club should sponsor more events like this. I have been trying to get the club to do a turning demonstration next to our (First State Woodturners) display of turned items at the Delaware State Fair for two years. Looks like we will have enough people next year to put on a demonstration. The club spent a lot of money on two lathes last year that can be used for demonstrations and we keep them at Mount Pleasant Technical High School in Wilmington, Delaware where we hold our club meetings when there is a turning class. After using the small blue lathe at a demonstration earlier this year with fellow IWCS member Art Lee, I spent a couple days and rebuilt the stand the lathe sits on, adding wheels, a handle and a Plexiglas shield to protect people from the flying wood chips when in use. This is the same lathe you see in Figures 2 & 3.

It is great fun showing people how wood is an important part of our lives. That there is a great variety of species in many colors, with different types of grain and that many species like Logwood, *Haematoxylum campechianum*, have a fascinating history. If you ever get the chance to participate in a show like this, do it. You will never regret it.