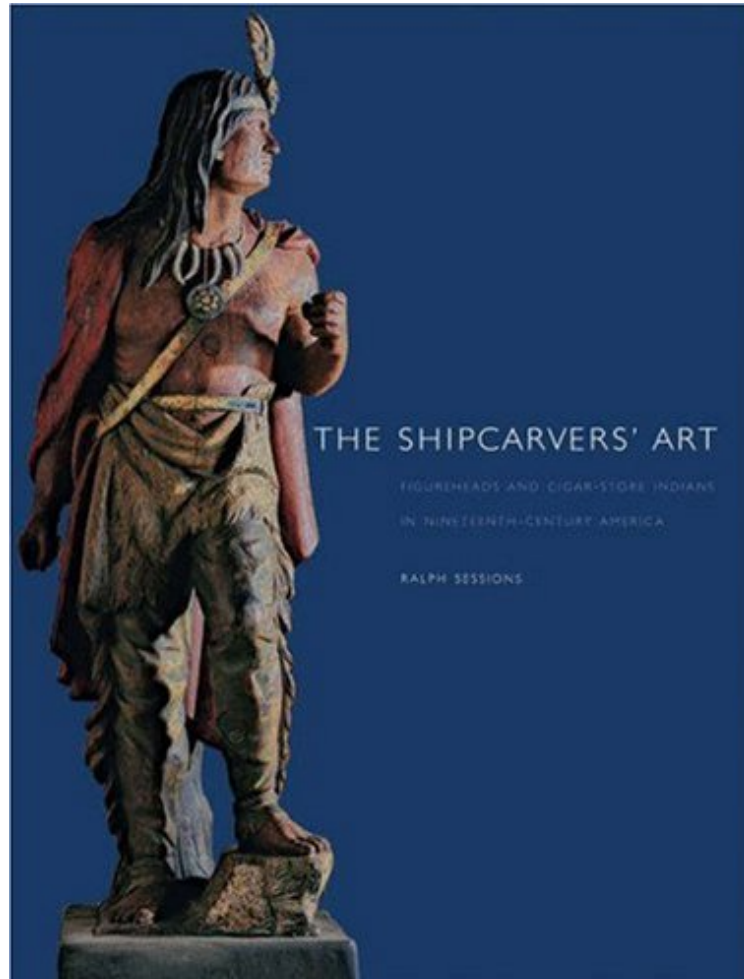


## The Shipcarvers' Art: Figureheads and Cigar-Store Indians in Nineteenth-Century America

Ralph Sessions

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**Ralph Sessions : The Shipcarvers' Art: Figureheads and Cigar-Store Indians in Nineteenth-Century America** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Shipcarvers' Art: Figureheads and Cigar-Store Indians in Nineteenth-Century America:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating history and display of Americana By D. Graves As one who once collected nautical antiques at a fairly high level, I never owned a ship's figurehead - but dreamed of it. Trips to the Peabody-Essex Museum (Salem, MA) with my father fueled that desire, seeing some of the best examples of the shipcarver's art still extant today. Seeing these figureheads up close, as you can at the PEM, you see the excellence of these artists in wood. What I wasn't aware of - and this is a major part of this excellent book - was the connection between the artists who created ships' figureheads and those who created cigar-store indians and other advertising

figures: they are one and the same. The book is an in-depth history of the shipcarvers' art as it existed in the upper Eastern Seaboard during the 19th century. It examines the shipbuilding industry, particularly in Boston and New York, and how these woodcarving artists divided their time between nautical and advertising work. Though not a 'picture book' per se, this is a large-format book with many excellent illustrations and photographs. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A nice book, but it does not replace *Artists in Wood* by R. Barnes. I have collected and studied Cigar Store Figures for over 20 years and am always looking to add to my collection ([www.cigarstorefigure.com](http://www.cigarstorefigure.com)). I also knew Frederick Freed and was a little disappointed that this book did not go beyond Mr. Freed's research in relation to Cigar Store Figures and those who carved them. I do applaud Mr. Sessions for not just arbitrarily labeling unknown carvers which seems to be normal procedure in the modern antique collecting world. Truth be told, very few of the Indians can currently be attributed to specific carvers. Many of the carvers worked in each others shops or were first apprenticed to other carvers as they learned their trade. Their carving styles are often similar if not indistinguishable. The current antique market seems to also be misinformed about original paint on these figures. Very few survive with the actual original surface, yet many dealers and collectors try to sell repainted figures as those having original surface (original paint does not have another color underneath that can be seen in the cracks). Again, I applaud Mr. Sessions for not mislabeling Cigar Store Figures in relation to their painted surfaces. This is a great book for someone who does not have Mr. Freed's *Artists in Wood* and for someone who is also interested in ships figureheads. 9 of 14 people found the following review helpful. Welcome addition to the canon by G. A. Zemenick MDI collect figures. I have read the books that are used for reference. I have seen the exhibit that was chaperoned by Mr. Sessions (Sandwich, MA., NYC, NY Baltimore, MD). I am a student of the art he describes! I was impressed by his scholarship, his easy east coast art scene style of writing, his photography/graphics, his homage to Ms. Sanburn, Mr. Pendergast Mr. Fried (I knew him). This is not a picture atlas. This is not a coffee table book. I would have liked to see/read more especially regarding the social relevance of color race c. (the folly of the time theirs ours) but this is another matter! I RECOMMEND this book to all who treasure American sculpture. The vulgar artist is finally getting his place (WELL DONE Mr Sessions! What is next?).

Among the most popular and ubiquitous sculptures in nineteenth-century America were the ship's figurehead and the cigar-store Indian. The vast majority of these engaging human figures were created by shipcarvers—highly skilled artists celebrated for their masterful figureheads but who collectively made tens of thousands of shop figures as well, from fanciful representations of American Indians to firemen, baseball players, and fashionable women. Shaped by nineteenth-century Anglo-American values, this artwork reflects the tenor of the times, including racial and gender stereotyping, America's emerging popular culture, and the birth of modern advertising techniques. *The Shipcarvers' Art* is the first book to assess the artistry and history of these two closely related genres in a single volume. Richly illustrated and elegantly written, it reveals the intertwining of art, commerce, and shipcarving in nineteenth-century America. On March 22, 1856, for example, only four months after Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem *Hiawatha* was first published, the clipper *Minehaha* was launched at an East Boston shipyard. Its figurehead depicted a renowned English actress in her role as *Hiawatha's* wife, *Minehaha*. Central to the festivities surrounding the event were poet, actress, and shipbuilder—and a fictional image of the Native American. Ralph Sessions not only highlights the work of shipcarvers throughout the eastern United States and Canada but also presents new information on carving workshops in New York City, America's key shipbuilding center from around 1820 until after the Civil War. Just as they were vanishing from the bows of ships and city streets around the turn of the twentieth century, figureheads and shop figures began to experience renewed interest as museum pieces and collector's items. Representing a milestone in scholarship on the subject, *The Shipcarvers' Art* magnificently brings them alive once more for art lovers of the twenty-first century.

Winner of the 2006 John Lyman Book Award in Reference, North American Society for Ocean History Winner of the 2006 William E. Fischelis Award, *The Victorian Society in America* "[A] clear-sighted survey of an area of art which is in danger of slipping into neglected obscurity. . . . This is another beautifully produced volume from Princeton. The illustrations are both handsome and informative in their own right. . . . I think this is an important book in that it brings to light a subject which can be seen as a genuine folk art within an industrialized society and which was in danger of disappearing completely."—Ian Charnock, *The Art Book From the Inside Flap* "Beautifully written, meticulously researched, and well-presented, *The Shipcarvers' Art* represents a major contribution to our understanding of nineteenth-century American visual culture. There is simply no other book out there that covers this material. It succeeds marvelously at understanding the material on its own terms, and presenting it in the context of American social history. That is a superlative achievement. All scholars of American art history and folk art, as well as collectors, will want this book."—Janet Catherine Berlo, author of *The Early Years of Native American Art History* "The *Shipcarvers' Art* will have an important and lasting impact on our understanding of shop figures. Ralph Sessions seeks to elevate the lowly 'Cigar-Store Indian' concept from offensive, maligned cast-off to a transcendent figure representing specific roles of American craftsmen as artisans and as mirrors of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century

popular culture. He explores new ground using an intensity not yet visited on this class of folk art. His engaging and approachable writing style coupled with many illustrations make this work available to a wide readership, which will appreciate this detailed look at a rather hidden--very neglected--class of folk art."--David H. Shayt, museum curator in American cultural history

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