Old courthouse reborn in wood

Inmate artists carve unique courthouse

BY PAUL KEDINGER

A symbol of justice for many residents of Evangeline Parish — the old courthouse — has been reborn in wood by three inmates in the parish jail.

Artist Warren Faul, assisted by fellow inmates Rustin Romero and Jimmy Bolla, worked 13 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week for almost two and a half months to fashion an eight by four foot wooden rendition of the 1910 courthouse etched out of two sheets of plywood.

The work, completed under the supervision of Deputy Red Vidrine in his carpenter, is a labor of appreciation dedicated to Sheriff Floyd Soileau and his wife. "I wanted to thank Mr. Floyd," Faul stressed. "He took a chance on me."

Pictures of Sheriff Soileau and his wife flank the courthouse that was carved in three dimensions and drawn with a wood-burning knife. Pictures of former sheriffs line the top border of the artwork. Cotton bolls, in recognition of the parish's heritage, were painted by Romero to highlight the raised frame.

Faul, a state prisoner, revealed his appreciation for Sheriff Soileau began over a year and a half ago when he was arrested on charges for which he was convicted. "He protected my rights," Faul reported regarding some personal mail. "This man impressed me."

While free on bond awaiting trial, Faul carved a four by three and a half foot plaque he calls "The Incarcerated Eagle." The eagle shown in flight over the U.S.A. clasps a scroll in his chained talons. The open leaves of a carved book at the bottom on the plaque urge Americans to "not chain down freedom's flight by your lack of responsibility."

The concept of a chained eagle also resulted in a yet unnamed song which Faul and a friend Roland Williams of Boothville composed and have since copyrighted.

Faul presented a framed color photograph of the eagle plaque to Sheriff Soileau. The picture now hangs on the wall behind the Sheriff's desk. The inmate artist now values the original Incarcerated Eagle, which has received attention in art shows and drawn with a wood-burning knife.

While free on bond awaiting trial, Faul carved a four by three and a half foot plaque he calls "The Incarcerated Eagle." The eagle shown in flight over the U.S.A. clasps a scroll in his chained talons. The open leaves of a carved book at the bottom on the plaque urge Americans to "not chain down freedom's flight by your lack of responsibility."

The concept of a chained eagle also resulted in a yet unnamed song which Faul and a friend Roland Williams of Boothville composed and have since copyrighted.

Faul presented a framed color photograph of the eagle plaque to Sheriff Soileau. The picture now hangs on the wall behind the Sheriff's desk. The inmate artist now values the original Incarcerated Eagle, which has received attention in art shows and drawn with a wood-burning knife.

While free on bond awaiting trial, Faul carved a four by three and a half foot plaque he calls "The Incarcerated Eagle." The eagle shown in flight over the U.S.A. clasps a scroll in his chained talons. The open leaves of a carved book at the bottom on the plaque urge Americans to "not chain down freedom's flight by your lack of responsibility."

One of 15 children of a sharecropper, Faul, 42, said he considers wood more challenging. Faul adds that the recently completed wall hanging has produced an unexpected bonus. "We lucked into a new technique, I won't reveal it now," he said. "People are going to be shocked with the new technique." Faul indicated he planned to copyright the new procedure and incorporate it into future projects.

Speaking of the future, Faul and Romero, 25, described projects involving work for the Ville Platte Chamber of Commerce and Governor Edwin Edwards. They want to make a carving of the oldest chamber building and the chamber's founders, and present a carving of the Edwards' home and family tree to the governor.

Paul Ortego and the chamber provided Faul and Romero with historical information on the former sheriffs and the courthouse building. The project for the governor is prompted by his recent battle in federal court, the men explained.

The prison artists are now waiting for a decision from the police jury on where the wall hanging, which weighs over 150 pounds, will be displayed in the new courthouse. If jurors accept the artwork, Faul hopes there will be a public unveiling and reception. The inmates also plan to compile documented information on the history of the courthouse, Evangeline Parish and Ville Platte "back to Napoleon."