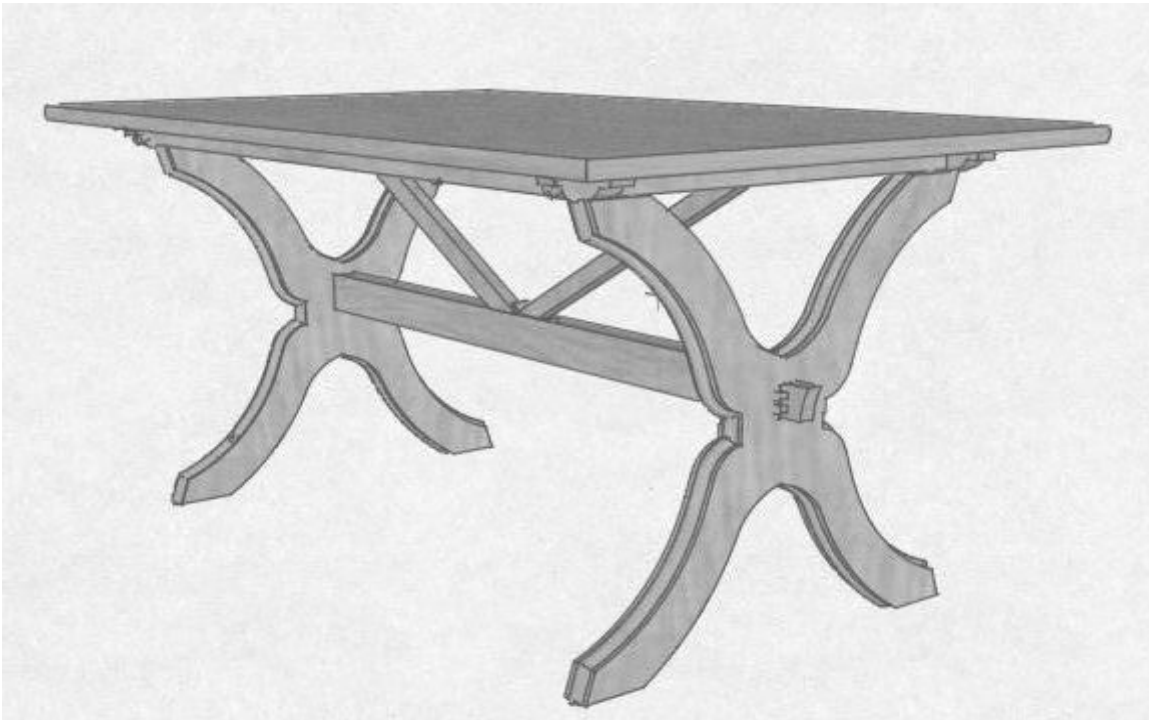


The Western Pennsylvania Table Project



artwork by Pat Logue, Kingfisher Studio

Background and explanation

It is amazing to me that three years on, many of the victims of Hurricane Katrina are still clawing their way back to some semblance of normal life. Long after the media trucks left, Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Charities, and others continue to quietly and slowly help to rebuild houses and offer assistance. Churches from all over the country continue to send mission groups to help with construction. A recent trip by our local church brought back a report that has sparked an idea.

One of the people our assistant pastor worked with in New Orleans was an older woman who had just moved into a Habitat house that replicated the one destroyed by the flood. Every piece of furniture in her new house had been donated, and she was in tears that for the first time in three years, she had a table.

Which leads to the idea. I design and build furniture professionally. I also teach adult woodworking classes. When I hear of someone needing furniture, the creative juices start flowing. What if there was a solid wood table, that was easily built, could be readily disassembled and reassembled, and could involve various levels of woodworking skills? Finally, could it be built and shipped from Western PA to Southern LA for \$100?

Eight years ago, I designed and built a trestle table for clients in Pittsburgh. It was an adaptation of the dining table from the Boone Estate in Birdsboro, PA. The original was designed to completely disassemble and pack on a Conestoga wagon heading west. It is functional, aesthetically pleasing, and can be reassembled in five minutes. Using dimensions suggested by Project Homecoming, the New Orleans version is 36"wide, 60"long, 29 1/2"high. These tables (and I'm thinking in multiples) readily lend themselves to production by people with moderate woodworking skills and fairly limited shop machinery (i.e., table saw, planer, band saw, biscuit joiner, and router). None of these power tools need to be larger than what any woodworker would have in his garage.

The Plan (See one, Do one, Teach one)

Locally we have a fair number of professional and hobbyist woodworkers. Some local churches have woodworking groups, and one has a fully equipped wood shop. Drawing on these as a core group, I want to identify five to ten people who have:

1. above average woodworking skills
2. a workshop where five people could comfortably and safely work
3. the ability to organize and lead two or three Saturday “builds”

This core group would do an initial build at my shop, where we would learn the process of building these tables, develop the flow of the work, identify tool requirements, and recognize any problem areas. Each of these “leaders” would be given a set of plans, a set of templates for the legs, and a step-by-step assembly guide which I would provide. I would organize the procurement and distribution of the lumber. Each “team” would consist of 4-5 volunteers to do the actual building under the leader’s supervision at his shop. I would anticipate most of the work being done on Saturdays, but that is up to the team. After the build, each table would be test assembled at our shop and finished.

The Goal and What is Needed

The initial goal is to build and deliver 100 tables to Southern Louisiana by mid-June, early July. These tables would be distributed by Project Homecoming (a ministry of the Southern LA Presbytery), Catholic Charities, and possibly GNODRP (Greater New Orleans Disaster Relief Project). These organizations would be responsible for qualification of recipients and logistics of local distribution.

The capital requirements are for cost of wood, finishing materials, and transportation for delivery. Each table would require approximately 40 board feet of lumber. They would be finished with Danish Oil. This is a serviceable finish that doesn’t require a spray booth, and is more durable than either lacquer or polyurethane.

The current lumber market has given us a gift in the fact that red oak is quite inexpensive relative to recent historic prices (down about 50%). Red oak is a stable good quality hardwood. It has been traditionally used for furniture, flooring and

cabinetry. A majority of Amish built furniture is red oak. It will hold up well to the high humidity conditions of the deep South.

We are raising approximately \$7500 for the first build. With current lumber prices, truck rental, and fuel, our delivered cost per table would be around \$70. We need your prayers, support, and participation. Funds are being received by New Wilmington Presbyterian Church, 229 S. Market street, New Wilmington PA 16101. Checks should be made payable to the church, and noted for the Western PA Table Project.

Over the coming six weeks, with the exclusion of Holy Week, I will be sharing this idea with various local churches. I anticipate that by the first week of April, we will be ready to have the “leaders” build and get the ball rolling.

A closing note: Jean Marie Peacock, of Southern Louisiana Presbytery, is the director of Project Homecoming for Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. When I explained this idea to her over the phone, she started crying. In a subsequent conversation she explained that she personally had lost her dining table in the flood. It had been in her husband’s family for four generations.

This project is an opportunity for those who don’t have the time or the means to go help, to do something locally that offers help and hope to those in need while learning and encouraging each other. I have a funny feeling that this is just the beginning.

Thank you,

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