



## Hosea Hayden: Homilies to Sit Upon

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**N**ot much is known of farmer and chairmaker Hosea Hayden, born on July 15, 1820, in the vicinity of Goodwin's Corner, Center Township, Union County, Indiana. Research into Hayden family genealogy, United States Census documents, and the Union County Historical Society records provide information that Hosea Hayden's forebears came to Massachusetts from England in 1630, spread throughout the Northeast, earned their livings as farmers and shipbuilders, fought in the American Revolution, and moved west to Ohio and Indiana in the early 1800s. Hosea's father, Stephen (born in 1783), is recorded as one of the original landowners in Union County, having purchased farm land there in 1813 or 1814. It was on that farm that Hosea was born, grew up, married, had six children, and lived until his death on August 29, 1897.

Hosea Hayden pursued chairmaking as a hobby, presumably only during the later years of his life. Although there is no record of how many chairs he made, ten were shown in the exhibition "Eccentric Chairs," conceived and curated by Jan Petry and presented by In'tuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art in Chicago from October 1 through October 30, 1993. Four others are known to be in private collections in Indiana, Connecticut, and New York, and it is likely that more, as yet undiscovered, exist. The earliest date found on the exhibited chairs is on the *Owl-back* chair, which is inscribed, "This tripod finished by Hosea Hayden on the 2nd day of Oct. 1883 in memory of the 100th year of the burth [sic] of Stephen Hayden. Father of Hosea Hayden of Union County Ind." The latest date found is 1896—the year before Hosea died—on the seat top of the *Last Wild Bear* chair, which is signed, "H.H. Ingraver [sic] 1896."

All the known chairs are folding chairs. Most of these were made as tripods, though at least one has a four-point support and another has a "perch" seat, with a sharp, single point that is sunk into the ground to provide stability. The chairs are crafted of various woods—hickory, walnut, and elm are common—and have either solid plank seats or cane seats (one has an upholstered seat pad); several have back rails or seat frames formed of bentwood.

Most men of Hosea's generation and occupation were competent woodworkers; his father also made furniture pieces, two of which are on exhibit at the Union County Historical Society, and some of his forebears were shipwrights. It is possible that the technique of bending wood by submerging it in water for years to "season" it and to make it pliable (we know from a contemporary record that Hosea claimed to have left wood under-water for as long as forty-six years) was passed down to him from the family's store of shipbuilding knowledge.

**Back row, left to right:**  
*Hunters Tripod*, date unknown; *Troubled Water*, 1895; *Indiana Life*, 1894; *Women's Rights*, date unknown

**Front row, left to right:**  
*Owl-back*, 1883; *Revelations Chapter XII*, 1894; *Buggy Handle*, 1892; *African Warfare*, 1892





**AFRICAN WARFARE**

**1892**

**Folding chair**

**Engraved wood, black ink**

**Courtesy Allen C. Creek, Liberty, Indiana**



**SEAT TOP:**  
Six African natives holding spears and snakes and facing four white men with rifles and pistols  
*African Warfare*  
*Anglosaxen warfare by Stanly near the Congo River, Africa*

**CROSSPIECE OF BACK:**  
**A REBUS:**  
*Bird in hand worth 2 in the bush*

**LEFT BACK SUPPORT:**  
Man in suit, no shoes  
*The deformed & the feeble-minded is increasing*  
*In his day Henry Burge was the greatest philanthropist that lived*



**RIGHT BACK SUPPORT:**  
Flag and flagpole with bird on top; woman at base with arm around pole  
*64-65 International strife*

**SEAT UNDERSIDE:**  
Standing man and woman  
*Once a City belle & a Country hunk*  
*Now under the same roof do bunk*  
*in absence of internal strife,*  
*One roof will do through life.*

Adam and Eve, nude, under tree  
*Paradise lost and knowledge gained*

**RIGHT REAR LEG, OUTSIDE:**  
Standing woman  
*A woman to be single in the face of degradation*  
*To marry a jealous old man*  
*woursts the situation*

**CENTER RUNG:**  
*H. Hayden, Union Co. Ind. 1892*

**LEFT REAR LEG, OUTSIDE:**  
Man in suit, walking away  
*She knows not that I am on her trail*  
*For her virtue I would not go bail*



Further whiffs of a nautical breeze in the family history are the delicacy of Hayden's details, his patterning of clothing and hair, and his use of red as well as black ink, all of which are reminiscent of the scrimshaw engravings made by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sailors.

Nearly all of the chairs are decorated with engraved illustrations accompanied by numerous inscriptions. Scenes and figures from the Bible, from nature, and of patriotic, historical, or local events are mixed, often incongruously, with personal observations, biblical references, homilies, original poems, scientific "facts," and political commentary. Sometimes Hosea added the names of the person or persons to whom the chair was given, the date, and his signature, "H.H. Ingraver." "These chairs were Hosea's 'journals' as well as inventive gifts of sculptural beauty made for his friends and neighbors to carry to ball games, picnics, fishing and hunting trips, etc." said Jan Petry, curator of the "Eccentric Chairs" exhibition.

The inscriptions on the chairs indicate that Hosea Hayden was an early champion of women's rights; his *Women's Rights* and *Buggy Handle* chairs stand as evidence that he believed that the intellect of females was not inferior to that of males, and he supported women's equality under the law. At the same time, his *Last Wild Bear* and *Indiana Life* chairs show that he enjoyed poking gentle fun at women's interest in clothes and changing fashions. He had an underlying belief in the equality of all human beings and their role in the "natural eternal law" of God and nature, as shown in *Indiana Life*. He also was cynical of ministers' treatment of the "brothers & sisters," as one can see from *Hunters Tripod*, and of the effect and goals of certain Christian sects; stripping the conventions from these sects, he reduces them to their essence in the concise couplets seen on the *Owl-back* chair.

In *The Hayden Family Magazine*, published in Chicago by Charles Hayden from 1929 to 1933, Benjamin Franklin Hayden, one of Hosea's nephews, calls Hosea a "versatile [sic] genius, as can be testified to by his neighbors and those who have visited his workshop and seen the many curios modelled by his skillful hand." The same nephew reports that Hosea loved to roam the fields and forests, to hunt and to fish, and that, though he traveled to various parts of the country and gained "a good knowledge of men of affairs in life," he always remained focused on his family and his community, where he was cherished as a thoughtful neighbor and a loyal citizen.

As an illustrator Hosea Hayden was truly a naïf, and as a grammarian and speller he was certainly "rustic" (though he was probably as well schooled as anyone else in mid-nineteenth-century rural Indiana), but the chairs he created were bursting with vitality, originality, and humor.

## REVELATIONS CHAPTER XII

1894

### Folding tripod

Engraved wood, black and red inks

Courtesy Marcellene O'Toole, Liberty, Indiana



#### SEAT UNDERSIDE:

Single-headed devil with hand to head and three angels  
*Chapt XII Chapt XII*

#### BACK SUPPORT, FRONT:

Toddler, boy, man; two women with broom and long pointed stick; child pointing at devil, red devil with hands on child's head  
*Revelation Chapt XII*

#### BACK SUPPORT, REAR:

Woman standing on crescent moon  
*Revelation Chapt XII*

#### LEFT REAR LEG:

*From Hosea Hayden to Lizzie Gibbins wife of Wm Line  
Give to devil his due forgetting not the President's proclamation of July 8th, 1894  
Presented to Mrs. Line the 15th July, 1894 being the 74 mile stone in life of H.H.  
Please dont let the children deface this*



#### SEAT TOP:

Standing woman facing seven-headed devil with tail in sea of stars  
*Chapt XII Chapt XII*

#### RIGHT REAR LEG:

*After careful reading the book of Revelation the engraver of these lines is compelled to believe the John was a Crank, if not, then there is no crank's in A.D. 1894*

*The engraver of these lines seen ten faces on one head whilst wrestling with la grip, upon the bed*

*To believe that John was sound body & mind twould be absurd Since science cuts such belief as air is cut, by a flying bird*

*Human beings only know that humans live to die Then the living human being mourn and sigh.*

**Note:** Devils from Revelations, a reference to a proclamation by President Cleveland, mention of Hosea's birthday, three rhymed couplets each on a different subject, and the plea, "Please dont let the children deface this," are prime examples of the randomness of Hosea's thoughts as he worked on his chairs.

This chair was a gift in 1894 from Hosea Hayden to the current owner's maternal grandmother, who used it as an extra seat at Chautauqua tent programs. The reference to the "President's proclamation July 8th, 1894" is to President Grover Cleveland's declaration to put Chicago under military rule because of organized labor's move toward a general strike.

He made his chairs only as commemorative or celebratory gifts for his friends, often engraving them with an ironic combination of illustration and inscription that provided a humorously sly comment on relationships and the human condition.

Sometimes the inspiration for the chairs is obscure, and the current owners, including the descendants of the original recipients, cannot offer further clarification. Whatever the motivation for creating them a hundred years ago, they are a true legacy of American folk art—intuitive, unassuming, genuine expressions of a self-taught craftsman and artist. ★

*Angie Mills, a member of In'tuit: The Center for Intuitive and Outsider Art, received her B.A. in art history from Wellesley College and her M.A., also in art history, from the Institute of Fine Art, New York University. Her professional career as a contract interior designer has introduced her to many chairs, but none of them, in her estimation, are as delightful as those of Hosea Hayden.*