

AT UNION-NA

They

By WENDY ARNDT HUNT

The fourth generation of this furniture factory family works at a desk opposite her father, the president of Union-National Company Inc. of Jamestown, N.Y.

Though 25-year-old Heidi Nord was graduated with a bachelor's degree in environmental science, for the past year she has worked alongside her father, Jack Nord, the grandson of August Nord, one of four brothers from Sweden who started the business in 1901.

Union-National is particularly noted for its hand-painted furniture.

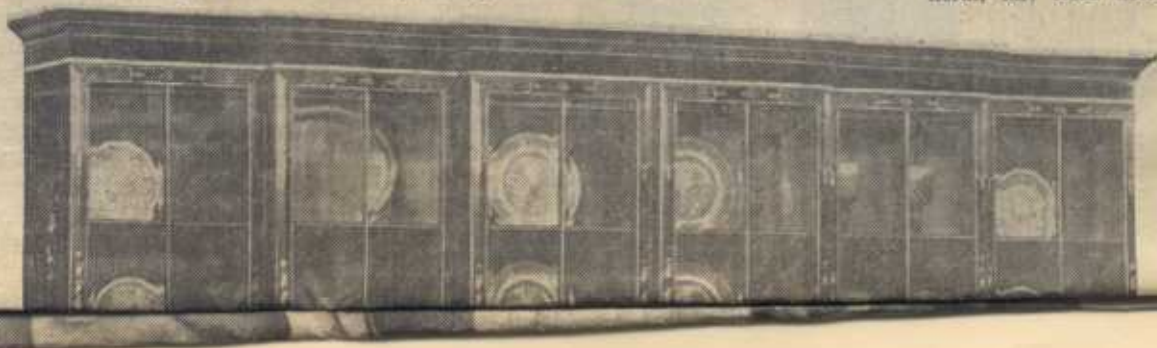
"Truly, they are works of art," says Jack Nord of the company's ornately decorated bedroom, dining room and occasional pieces. There are certain dealers who will even request a specific artist." Mr. Nord says, because styles differ among the seven women artists. And Union-National customers are urged to remember that no two will be alike, because they are hand done.

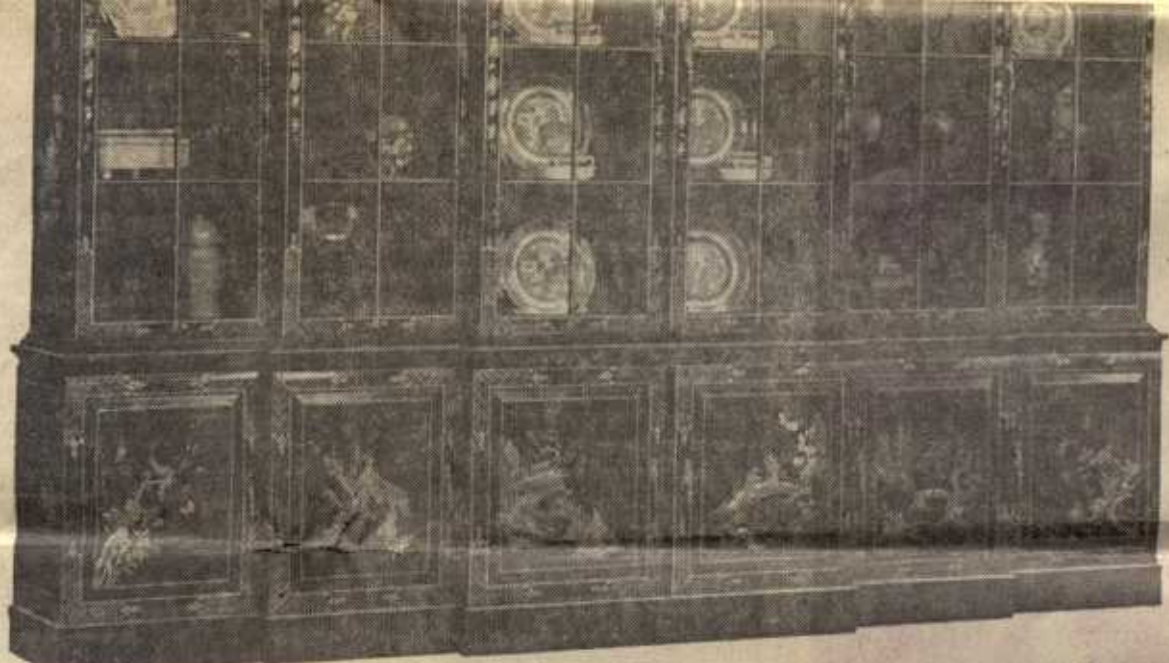
Fingering one of the patterns, the 49-year-old president points out a signature nestled close to the design. "See, they are even signed."

THE ARTISTS work with 12 master patterns. The French floral, Mr. Nord notes, looks

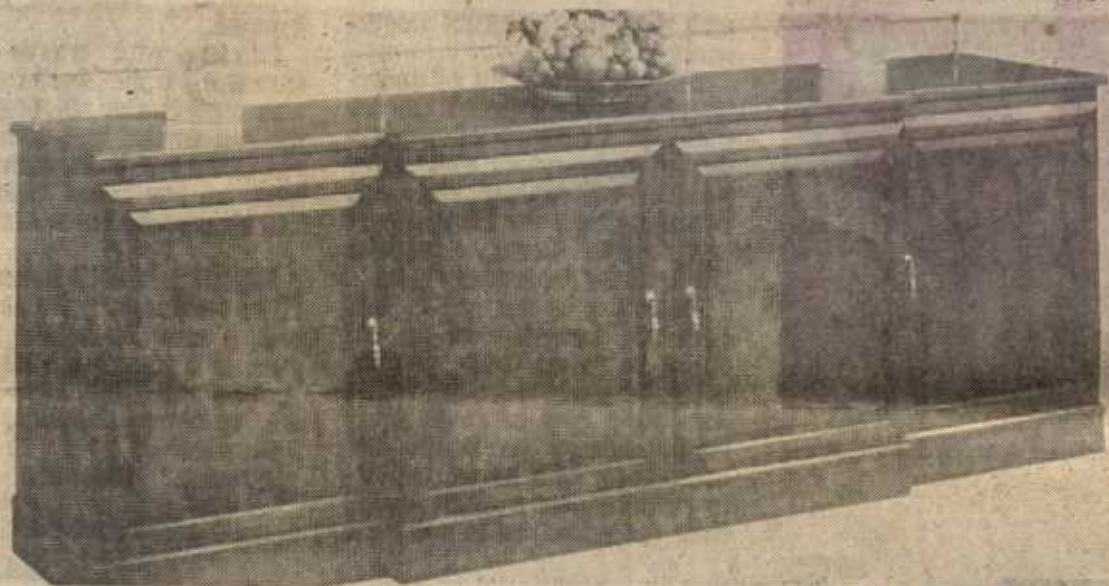


HEIDI NORD, great-granddaughter of one of the founders of Union-National Company, is shown with shipping foreman Gordon Burns.





UNION-NATIONAL is noted for its hand decorated furniture. This breakfront is painted with gold.



THE VENEERED DOORS of this buffet have a starburst pattern.

TIONAL . . .

Make an Art of Furniture

more like a china painting whereas the Fleur de Lucille, a pattern named after his Aunt Gladys (Gladys Lucille Nord, treasurer of Union-National), looks more like a watercolor. "See how the artist used her finger to smudge the background?" Mr. Nord inquires.

Seventy percent of Union-National's furniture, the graceful lines adapted from 18th century French, 18th century Italian and Louis XV, is hand decorated.

The technique was adopted during the late 1920s by the owners of a business that had to endure not only the Depression, but also cheap-labor competition from the South.

Union-National countered these threats with the aesthetic skills of Genoa Samuelson, a Jamestown-born artist, who perfected the initial master patterns.

On the top floor of the factory, Retha Smith, an artist at Union-National for 14 years, stands beside a black lacquered dresser. The black is dotted with dust that faintly outlines the shape of the Chinoiserie decoration.

To mark the dresser, she placed a pin-punched brown paper pattern over the section front, then dusted it lightly, allowing the particles to drift through the holes and settle on the flat surface.

She now stirs the red lacquer dope in a small, baby food jar, then drips it onto the wood, following the dotted sketch. Arching the brush, she guides the thick paint down onto the surface without allowing the bristles to touch the black. This method raises the decoration, giving it three dimensions.

NEARBY, Jack Washington, who hand-carves all the master wood patterns, is striping a black lacquered night stand. This, too, he does by hand.

On a glass table top where tiny, circular boxes protect gleaming gold and silver powders, Washington mixes his paint. Dipping a brush with long, thin bristles into the paint, he deftly slides the tip along a guideline drawn on the edge of the piece.

The brush wavers here and there, causing the strip to widen in some places, narrow in others. The unevenness gives it its distinctive beauty, Mr. Nord says.

The painted striping is dark, its edges a bit blurred. For a shiny look and a sharp line, gold tone metal leaf is used.

Imported from Milan, Italy, the feather-light, thin gold leaf is adhered with a special glue. The excess is cut away. Au-



—News Staff Photographer Robert I. Smith

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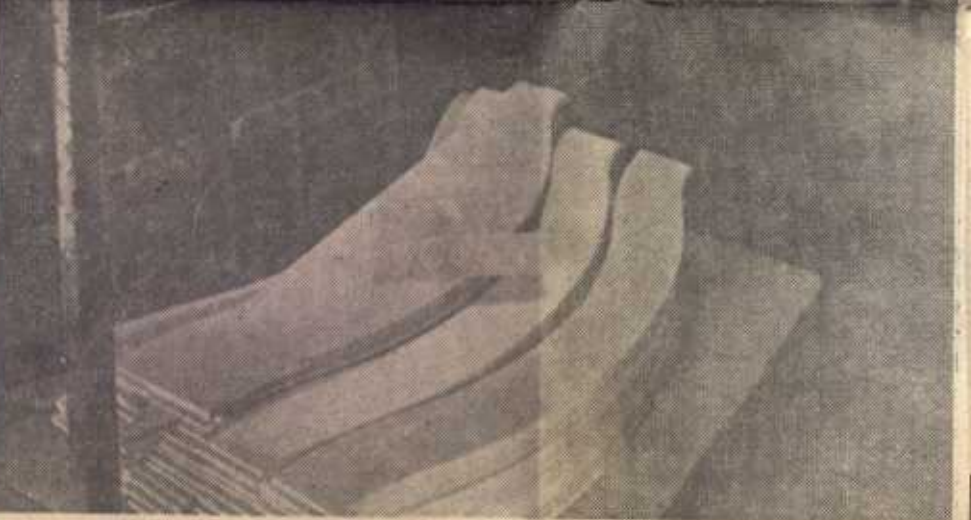
Imported from Milan, Italy, the feather-light, thin gold leaf is adhered with a special glue. The excess is cut away. Authenticity of gold leaf is verified by the seams where the sheets are butted up against each other, Jack Nord says.

BESIDES BEING hand-painted and striped, some of Union-National furniture is veneered. The cherry, Carpathian elm and satinwood veneers are laid up in the factory to suggest starbursts, sprays and diamonds; then applied to table tops and face doors.

But many steps precede the finishing work, Mr. Nord points out.

Union-National furniture, which now has 150 pieces in the line, is designed by Nicholas De Vries, a freelance designer from Connecticut, who has worked for this Jamestown business since the early 1950s.

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Except for the Carpathian elm, which is purchased from the Northwest, the wood is bought locally. "After all, the cherry is right in our backyard," Mr. Nord says, explaining that they use cherry for furniture with wood finishes and maple for painted.

THE WOOD is dried, cut, glued, shaped, assembled, and stored in the "white" — unfinished. No piece is finished until a customer orders it. Union-National offers 80 finishes, not counting the hand painted patterns or veneers.

All of an order is completed at one time, and if it is to be hand painted, one artist decorates all pieces.

Once the order is placed, the finishing steps are initiated . . .

All glazes, stains and lacquers are sprayed on. While it's wet, texture can be added with the stroke or swirl of a brush or the dab of a pad.

Once the finish and/or decorations are applied, two coats of protective water-white lacquer are sprayed on. Because this lacquer has an amber hue, the artist must have compensated for color when mixing her oils for any hand painting.

The mirror finish is attained by hand rubbing with a compound; the satin finish with fine grain sandpaper. It is the painstaking hand rubbing, Jack Nord says, that gives Union-National furniture its refined appearance.

Using brass hardware bought from a Jamestown company, Chautauqua Hardware Corporation, and beveled and bent glass from another local business, Faulkner Glass Industries, the furniture is trimmed, for the final step.

They'll Last Longer

Turn rugs around periodically so they will wear and soil evenly. And while you're at it, change the location of heavy furniture if it rests on rugs or carpeting. If your furniture is carving dents in your rugs, hold a steam iron several inches above the spots for a minute or two. Then go over the area several times with your vacuum cleaner to raise the nap, making sure the rug is dry first.



MANY STEPS BEFORE the hand decorating, Tim Vanguilder prepares the cut pieces for assembly.

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