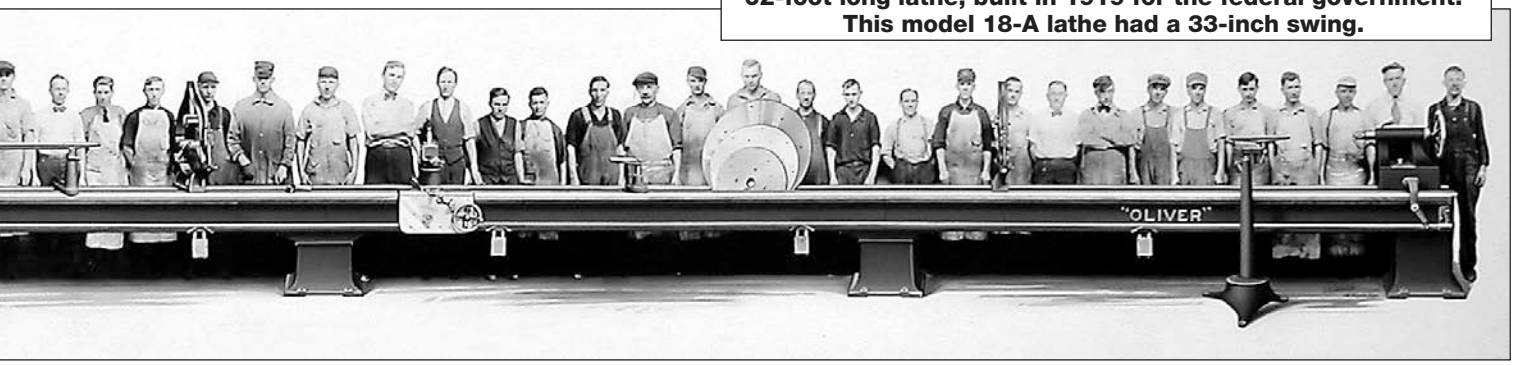


All in a day's work: Forty-four Oliver employees stand behind a 62-foot long lathe, built in 1919 for the federal government. This model 18-A lathe had a 33-inch swing.

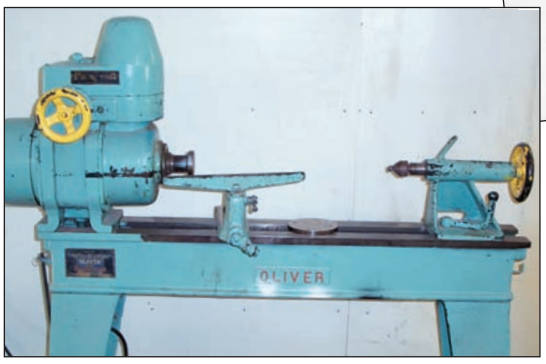
cut the unique tiles for the Space Shuttle program.

Lathes of every size imaginable were a story unto themselves. I have found no company anywhere in the world that made such a diverse range of lathes, from their small "Junior Lathe" to enormous faceplate lathes and the beast shown *above*.

Pattern and millwork shops and especially public and trade schools were commonly outfitted with Oliver lathes—known for their ruggedness, heft, and reliability. Innovations included direct power drive lathes (the headstock spindle is the armature for the motor), electronic variable speed systems, and motor or spindle brakes to reduce the time to stop the machine. Oliver also pioneered quick-action tailstocks, chucks to hold square material, and an improved system for locking tool rest bases.

And today? The company we revered ended in 1999 when an individual purchased the Oliver name. You may see woodworking machinery (tablesaws, shapers, jointer, sanders, but no lathes yet) made in the Orient under the Oliver logo. However, these Asian machines aren't original Oliver designs at this time.

A former employee, Richard Fink, purchased all Oliver drawings, patterns, documents, machine inventory, and many parts to service the Oliver equipment still in service. Under the Eagle brand name, Richard now manufactures two original Oliver machines—the 24" planer and the famous Straitoplaner that mills coveted.



Thinking that variable speed was a recent lathe innovation? If you leaf through history, you'll find a 1920s Oliver ad for the model 51-K that included this feature. AAW member John Magnussen of Buffalo, MN, still uses the Model 51 lathe at left.

Alan Lacer (www.alanlacer.com) is an *American Woodturner* contributing editor. He lives near River Falls, WI.

References: *Vintage Woodworking Machinery by* ***Dana Batory****.*
Special thanks to ***Richard Fink*** *of Eagle Machinery and Repair (Oliver Machinery employee from 1976 until 1999 and the source for Oliver parts and service), and to* ***George Paes*** *of Nipomo, CA, a former Oliver employee district salesman, for their assistance in researching this article.*