



Marvin Grant relaxes in one of his hand-woven creations in Pawleys Island, S.C.  
photo by David Mudd

## Made in the Shade

Pawleys Island crafts handwoven history  
by Marti Attoun

A yearning for a good night's sleep on steamy summer nights led riverboat Capt. Joshua John Ward of Pawleys Island, S.C. (pop. 138), to design a cotton rope hammock in 1889. More than a century later, production of his hand-woven hammocks remains in full swing.

"Ward is typically credited with creating the classic American hammock style," says Frank Rabey, marketing manager for The Hammock Source in Greenville, N.C. (pop. 60,476), which makes and sells more than 30,000 Original Pawleys Island Rope Hammocks each year.

Though sailors had used hammocks for centuries, the cramped and tipsy beds proved less than an ideal slumber. Sewn from coarse canvas or made with hemp rope and knotted throughout, the materials were scratchy and uncomfortable, and the lumpy grass-filled mattresses of the day were hot in the sweltering South.

Ward improved upon the traditional hammock design by substituting cool, comfortable cotton rope, stabilizing the hanging bed and expanding its sleeping area. "Ward's greatest contribution to hammock-making has to be the spreader bar," Rabey says.

Using slats from oak barrels, the captain made a bar for each end of the hammock to hold it wide. He bored evenly spaced holes in the bars and fed cotton rope ends through the holes, then tied each threaded rope to a looped end in the woven hammock. This way, all knots were tied away from the bed itself.

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As the captain ferried rice and other cargo between inland plantations and the port at Georgetown, S.C., he found sleeping a breeze in his handmade hammock and began making the hanging beds for other people. In 1935, Ward's brother-in-law A.H. "Doc" Lachicotte Sr. opened the Original Hammock Shop and Nursery, one of the first tourist shops in Pawleys Island, to sell the rope beds. Today, craftsmen continue to weave hammocks in a shed near the original shop.

"It's like crocheting, only you're standing," says Marvin Grant, 52, as he nimbly moves a 2-foot-long wooden shuttle, wound with cotton rope, in and out of the hammock body. After 17 years on the job, Grant can weave 1,200 feet of rope into a hammock in about two and a half hours.

Grant lets customers weave some loops, then asks them to send him a postcard. As a result, some 1,500 postcards cover the walls of the shed. Included are notes from satisfied customers such as Arthur Monegain, of Raleigh, N.C., who bought his hammock 30 years ago and still naps in it on his screened-in porch.

"I've never had to repair anything on it," says Monegain, 55. "On the weekends, after a long day at work or a workout, it's great to relax on."

Every hammock is woven by hand, just as in Ward's day, whether it's made at the shop in Pawleys Island, at the workshop in Greenville, N.C., or by weavers in Brazil, who help fill orders during peak summer season.

Other than using modern weather-hardy polyester cord or thicker three-ply cotton rope, the hammock design is unchanged. The curved oak spreader bars and hardware to hang the hammocks, which range in price from \$110 to \$190 for various sizes, are added at the Greenville factory where every hammock is inspected.

The classic Original Pawleys Island Rope Hammock, named for the laid-back resort town and island where it originated, can be found swaying under trees in backyards across America. Its purpose remains as simple as when Capt. Ward created it—a comfortable place for an afternoon siesta or all-night snooze.

"You don't want to mess with a beloved tradition without very good reason," Rabey says.

FIRST APPEARED: 6/4/2009



PAWLEYS ISLAND SPOTLIGHT,  
"AMERICAN PROFILE,"  
JUNE 7-13, 2009;  
ONLINE VERSION SAME AS PRINT