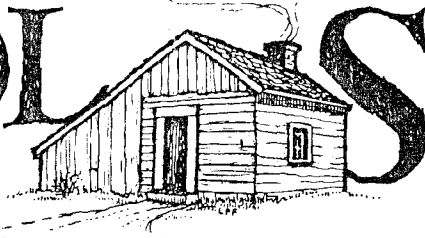


# The TOOL SHED

Number 9



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## NEW MEMBERSHIP YEAR BEGINS

CRAFTS of New Jersey began its 1979-1980 membership year on July first.

As those who attended the June meeting know, the organization ended the 1978-1979 year with 49 husband and wife memberships and 51 individual memberships, for a total of 149.

If anyone has forgotten to renew his or her membership, this can easily be remedied by sending your five dollars (\$5.00) to C. Carroll Palmer, 725 Pemberton Ave., Plainfield, NJ 07060.

Membership for the current year will run until June 30, 1980.

## "CRAFTS" OPENS NEW YEAR ON SEPTEMBER 23rd

CRAFTS of New Jersey will hold its first meeting of the 1979-80 year on Sunday, September 23, from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Field Homestead, 260 River Road (Rte. #18) in Piscataway.

The program for the afternoon will feature Mr. Gordon Olsen, speaking on "Old American Locks." Members who have any early examples of the locksmith's art are asked to bring them for display.

Harry O'Neill will preside over the "Whatsit?" identification. Members are asked to bring only one item for this portion of the program.

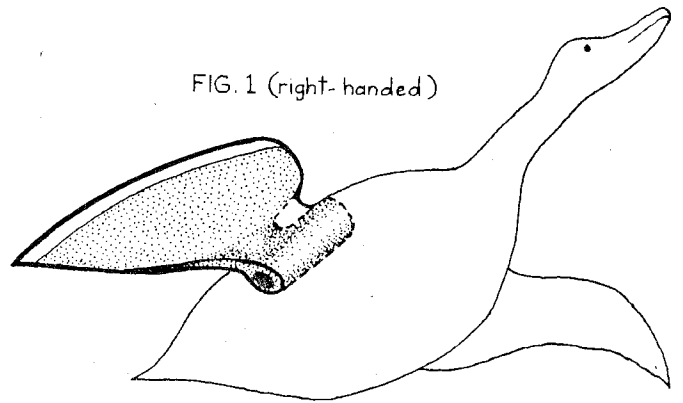
The meeting will conclude with the "Swap & Sell" and, undoubtedly, a lot of talk about the fantastic acquisitions made over the summer.

## GOOSEWING AXES by Herb Kean

The goosewing is one of the most celebrated of all the edge cutting tools. According to Eric Sloane, it once competed in an art contest! Although indicators exist that it might have been used as a medieval fighting ax, it is a functional broad ax, used basically for hewing.

Various shapes have their origins in different countries and are known as turkey wings, angel wings, etc. The earliest shape shown in Mercer's Ancient Carpenters' Tools is the Central European style of the 16th century (see Figure 1). The bulk of the American axes (Figure 2) were made in Pennsylvania from the 18th to

FIG. 1 (right-handed)



the mid-19th centuries. However, foreign axes have been made well into the 20th century. German troop trucks carried goosewings as utility side axes during World War II. Some axes are still made in Scandinavia and Spain, and reproductions are coming out of Austria even today.

The skill required in forging a goosewing far exceeds that needed for the common broad ax. Instead of a



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Membership in CRAFTS is open to anyone interested in early trades and industries, and the identification, study, and preservation of tools and implements used and made in New Jersey. Annual dues are five dollars for the membership year of July 1 to June 30.

Membership fees may be sent to the Treasurer:

C. Carroll Palmer  
725 Pemberton Avenue,  
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#### The Tool Shed

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Contributions, especially about New Jersey tools and  
trades, are welcomed.

be called something other than "Flemish scythe." Always a reasonable man, Ray is willing to accept "Hainault scythe." Just don't call it a sith!

Three persons suggested that it be called a "short scythe." Ray Townsend pulled the rug from under that proposal, however, with documentation showing that the terms "short scythe" and "long scythe" were used in the 18th century to distinguish between blade lengths, not handle lengths. As a matter of fact, 18th century agriculturists seem to have been quite particular in their blade (and handle) specifications, as different shapes were used for different purposes.

A provocative response came from David Laurent, who wanted to know whether the Flemish scythe was ever used in New Jersey. We do not know. But if it was used in the Hudson, Mohawk and Schoharie Valleys by the New York Dutch, why wouldn't it have been used in the Delaware, Raritan and Hackensack Valleys by the Jersey Dutch? Does anyone know of any evidence that it was?



The article on "The Myth of the Sith" (Tool Shed, April, 1979) by Raymond R. Townsend, our Williamsburg, Va., correspondent, drew a number of comments.

In the article Ray pointed out that the word sith was merely an obsolete form of scythe and that there is no evidence that the word ever designated a particular form of scythe—particularly the short-handled "Flemish scythe." He traced this "myth" back to a 1927 book by Jared Van Wagenen.

No one disputed Ray's conclusions, but several thought that the tool should

GOOSEWING, cont'd. from Pg. 1

single roll-around and lap with a laid-in piece of steel, the goosewing requires four separate pieces. Kauffman, in American Axes, gives an excellent description of this technique; and although there may have been other ways, his analysis is certainly a logical alternative. Axes made by lesser blacksmiths clearly show the voids and seams of this construction.

The use of the goosewing is not as speculative as its history. Hewing was its main purpose. Weighing up to nine pounds, and with its 13" (avg.) handle, it is obvious that the ax was not swung as a felling ax. It is powered diagonally downward with a short stroke with the outside hand, and guided for proper angle with the inside hand. The center of balance almost

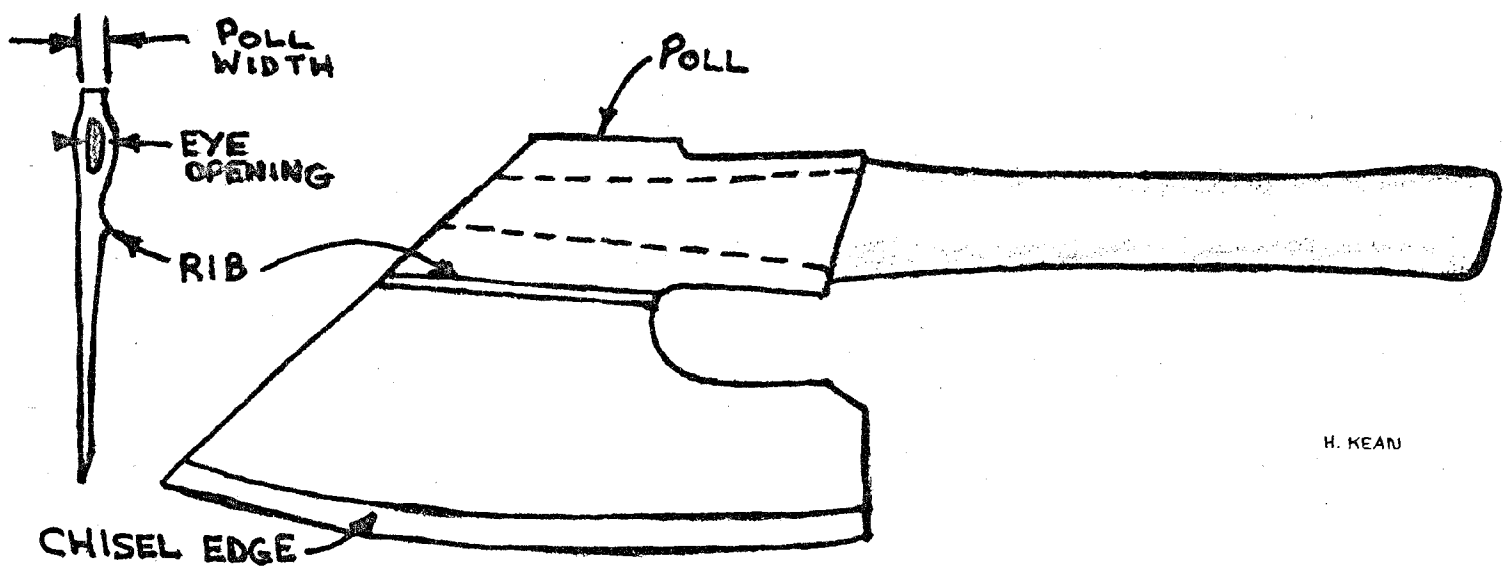


FIG.2 (left-handed)

allows a one-handed swing. The experienced hewer lets the heavier axes cut under their own weight.

The ax being asymmetrical, the smith had to forge both right-handed and left-handed styles. A right-handed goosewing is designed to be used on the right side of the log with your right hand forward. It is not always for a right-handed person! Many right-handed people get better accuracy by guiding with their right hand. As hewing demands considerable accuracy, some right-handed hewers use left-handed axes and work from the left side.

An interesting test of this theory is that the ratio of right-handed to left-handed axes is about 2 to 1 (44 of the 70 goosewings tallied were right-handed). Recognizing the overwhelming number of right-handed people, it is obvious that some of them preferred or needed left-handed axes.

The more common argument today is the origin of the ax. Those Pennsylvania makers who signed their axes left no doubts as to origin, and help us today to compare the unsigned axes. No rule is without exception, and unsigned axes should be judged by the total number of indicating characteristics.

Of the 24 axes studied closely, the characteristics of American versus foreign axes are generalized below (only seven of the 28 recorded characteristics showed significance):

1. Axes with narrow eye opening on the forward end (under  $3/8''$ ) are almost always American.
2. Highly decorated pieces are more Germanic.
3. Europeans swayed their handles; Americans forged more cant in the eye and used a straighter handle.
4. Grainy, pocked or rough "charcoal" iron is more American than the smoother, higher quality iron of Europe.
5. European axes have higher ribs; many American axes have no ribs at all.
6. The eagle strike is almost always American.
7. Polls wider than  $3/4''$  are predominantly European.

Some of the known Pennsylvania makers were: Addams, Stohler, Stahler, Sener, Rohrbach, and Beatty (rare). The only New Jersey maker found was Luke Miller (ca. 1780), of Madison. New York boasts of L. & I. J. White.

It must be remembered that many of the American ax makers got their

IMPRINTED  
HAMMER HANDLES  
by Frederick A. Shippey



About a year ago I was poking around in the back room of a local hardware store in Newport, Maine. The object of my search was a wooden handle to fit my favorite small claw hammer. The proprietor had urged me to explore a little-used stock bin high up in a dark corner. Eventually I found a few handles of assorted sizes covered with several decades of accumulated dust, yet still marked with depression years' prices— 27 cents each!

In the process of cleaning the dust away, I discovered a familiar outline stamped in red on the end of each handle. Further, several words were imprinted within the perimeter line. The red outline shows the convoluted boundary of the state of Maine. A dot marks the location of Newport. The words "A BENNETT HANDLE" appear on the ends of both hammer and axe handles, indicating the name of the local craftsman now known to only a few of today's townspeople.

For me, this was the first instance of a handle manufacturer's name. If marked at all, handles usually have a

modest paper label affixed, which soon falls off or wears away with use. Bennett's imprint, on the other hand, is likely to survive many years of the tool's usage.

Preliminary inquiries around town since the hardware store visit disclose that the handle maker actually resided in Newport for many years; that he carried out his manufacturing process (with a helper) in a small barn beside his modest home; that he produced handles in great numbers; and that he delivered the products to nearby hardware stores up and down the Sebasticook River valley. The merchants purchased all that Bennett could make.

The hardware store incident has stimulated a personal interest in Bennett, the hammer-handle maker. Hence, I am pursuing a modest research project to find answers to six questions: (1) Who is this man and when were his productive years? (2) Is he still living in Newport or in a neighboring town? (3) How can I arrange an interview with Mr. Bennett? (4) What has become of his tools and machines? (5) Does he still have his maker's stamps and, if so, can I procure one? (6) What leftover, seasoned lumber and/or unsold handles remain today?

Several old-timers around Newport claim remembrance of Bennett and his family. It is hoped that the investigative project can turn up some interesting information during the coming months.

This brief research note suggests two important questions for CRAFTS members and other collectors. First, how often do we find a handle maker who labels his products? Second, how many little-known, small-scale makers of tools, handles, etc., have lived and worked in relative obscurity in small villages and towns across New Jersey? Possibly we should investigate such people as well as the big manufacturers.

What do you think about the idea?

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GOOSEWING, cont'd. from Pg. 3

skills in their mother mother countries, predominantly Germany, and copied some or all of the European characteristics when first arriving in this country. These early axes are hard to categorize. The quality of the iron is their most pertinent characteristic.

The goosewing is generally the focal point of a display or collection, and rightly so. With its graceful and dramatic form, it represents both strength and finesse, a rare combination.

(Thanks to my friends in Pennsylvania for their help and advice: Frank Kerr, Dallas John, Merk Beitler, and Ben Alexander.)