A Journal of Tool Collecting published by CRAFTS of New Jersey

Axes and Adzes at CRAFTS June 5, 2005
By Hank Allen
with photos by Charlie Flynn

This article is based on a talk I gave at the June CRAFTS meeting. First, I'm not an axe or adze collector, I just happen to have a few interesting ones that I've acquired over the years, primarily from the Crane and David Stanley auctions. Second, I don't pretend to be an expert on the subject, but I enjoyed preparing for the talk and giving it. CRAFTS meetings always have an inquisitive audience.

Herb Kean was in my basement tool room in April, and I was telling him about some of my axes and adzes. He roped me into talking about them at a CRAFTS meeting. I displayed about 60 tools at the meeting, explaining that the group represented a fairly narrow selection of collectible axes and adzes. That's because: (1) I don't collect tools made by large manufacturers, so there were no tools by Kelly, Collins AA&T, etc., (2) I don't collect tools made after 1875 so there were no examples from all of the great axes made after that time, and (3) I like to have the maker's name on tools, so there were no really primitive examples, except that hand adzes are often unmarked. Of course, rules are made to be broken, and I've done that a few times.

THE AXE

Goodman says of axes, "Any comprehensive study of the history of woodworking tools must of necessity begin with the axe; it was not only the first, but for many years almost the only woodworking tool of any kind, …" First there were stone-age axes. Then came copper axes, the first metal axes, probably taken from copper outcroppings. Then it was discovered that copper could be strengthened by hammering. Smelting came next, perhaps as early as 4000 BC. Then bronze came along when some tin ore got mixed in with the copper ore, probably by accident. The British Museum has bronze axes dated to 2900-2700 BC.

Iron tools predate 1200 BC, which is generally considered the beginning of the Iron Age. Someone, somewhere, at some time discovered that mixing iron ore, charcoal and a (Continued on page 4)
The purpose of CRAFTS of New Jersey is to encourage interest in early trades and industries, and in the identification, study, preservation and exhibition of tools and implements used and made in New Jersey as an integral part of our heritage.

Membership in CRAFTS is open to anyone who shares the above interests. Annual dues per person or couple are fifteen dollars for the membership year of July 1 through June 30. Membership fees may be sent to the Treasurer: John Whelan, 38 Colony Court, Murray Hill, NJ 07974 (write check payable to CRAFTS of New Jersey).

CRAFTS of NJ meetings are held at the HOST Masonic Lodge in High Bridge, NJ. Take I-78 to Route 31 exit at Clinton. Go north on Rte. 31 two miles to second traffic light at the High Bridge exit. Turn right and go about half a mile to Dennis Ave. Turn left, then straight to the Masonic Lodge (on the left). Tailgate sales in the parking lot begin at 10 A.M., meeting starts at 1 P.M.

The TOOL SHED
Published five times a year for members of CRAFTS of New Jersey. Editor: Dave Nowicki, 240 Woodlyn Ave. Glenside PA 19038. EMAIL - dnowicki@verizon.net.

Articles, especially about early tools and trades, are encouraged and may be sent to the Editor.

CRAFTS WEBSITE
www.craftsofnj.org

Containing general information about CRAFTS and its activities including: meeting schedules, Tool Shed articles, etc.

New Members
Scott Weems  Denville NJ
Cliff Risell, Newtown, PA
Ray Wernersbach, Milford, NJ.
Barry & Sandra Bock, Toms River, NJ
Callum Higgins, Union, NJ.
Scott Fulmer, Hopewell, NJ
Anthony & Mary Ellen Lach, Washington Township, NJ

President’s Corner

It is a great honor to be the new president of CRAFTS. I appreciate all the confidence that you members have placed in me. I know I must carry on the tradition of strong leadership by past presidents to make this club the best. It has been thru such dedicated leadership and dazzling contributions of many members that allow our club to prosper for almost thirty years. I will guarantee all members that I will enthusiastically set aside the time and energy required to manage our club thru the coming years.

It was not long ago that I was a lost and desperate soul wandering the isles of flea markets searching for used woodworking tools to supply my shop. I thrilled over the prospect of acquiring a Stanley plane and taking it home spending the afternoon cleaning it and fine tuning all the different parts. I was lucky to have met a very talkative fellow at one of these flea markets and he marveled over the wheelwright’s clamp I had just purchased. We were both enthralled over the large hand formed screw-thread the clamp utilized. During our brief talk he mentioned he also collected antique tools and was even going to his club’s meeting the next day. He asked if I wanted to go. Well, the wife didn’t have a chance to add to the “honey do list” before I slid out the door for my first “CRAFTS” meeting. My new friend, Mel Chudley, introduced me to many of his club’s friends. I was amazed that there were so many other men like me who had a passion for old tools. I was immediately attracted to this club as there were so many unique personalities with varied backgrounds but with “TOOLS” being the common denominator connecting us all together.

Wanting to be as active as I could with my interest in tools, I accepted the position of Tool Shed editor. It was during these years that I realized the many other active members that contributed to the success of CRAFTS. So many members are active coordinating CRAFTS activities such as the picnic, auction, the Tool Shed, and meetings. Behind the scenes members keep our finances in order, coordinate with other clubs and tool events, and produce our web page. We are well known in the tool community as CRAFTS members regularly publish research and information on tool related topics. Users of tools well know that our members distinctively represent the craftsman of today practicing their wide-ranging talents. I am humbled by their contributions and can only say, “I will do my best to do my duty”.

Your new CRAFTS president
Bob Garay

Everyone has the ability and flair for creating new ideas, using different ways to create interest, or fire up enthusiasm. We often find inspiration from the writings and presentations of others. Share your tool related knowledge and stories with the Tool Shed and present tool related topics at one of our many meetings. Your contributions will inform and inspire others.
In February of 2001 Mike Clum, a well known local auctioneer, called me and said he had just picked up a consignment that included a plane he thought I might like to see. That, as it turned out, was an understatement. As soon as I saw the plane I knew it was something special, even though it was covered with dirt and looked like it had been stored in someone’s attic for years.

The maker’s mark was G. Strode, stamped twice, surrounded by multiple sunbursts. I had in my collection three planes marked J. Strode with the same double stamp and sunbursts. Who the Strodes were at that time was unknown to me.

Mike put the plane in his March 2001 auction and, as he is wont to do with a good piece, sold it as the first lot. The bidding started in the normal way but soon there was only me and another bidder who had been drawn to the auction by Mike’s sale bill which listed a “signed Strode plow plane with ivory tips and heart”. I finally prevailed, but suffice to say that if my late wife hadn’t been emphatic about wanting me to “buy that plane”, I wouldn’t be writing this story.

The under bidder, to whom I’m very grateful, called me that evening and said there had been paperwork at the auction that indicated that the plane might have a Fairfield County connection. I contacted the Fairfield County Heritage Association, who have in their collection two pieces of furniture attributed to a John Strode, and through them was able to locate Strode descendents here in Fairfield County. I found both John and George in the 1850 census, John working here in Hocking Township and George working in Greenfield Township, both listed as plane makers.

John came to Fairfield County with his father in 1804. They came from Berkley County, Virginia (now West Virginia) and settled in Hocking Township.

John married Hannah Davis in 1823 in Lancaster. They had eleven children, the oldest being George L. born in 1824. In 1851 John sold his farm and with the rest of the family, except George, moved to Muscatine County, Iowa. He died there in 1865.

George married Mary L. Kistler in 1846 in Lancaster. Some time after 1850 he and his family moved to Indiana where he served in the Civil War. He died on April 19, 1898 in Wichita, Kansas with his occupation listed as a jeweler.

To find that two Plane makers worked here in the County where I live and in the case of John, the same Township, has been the highlight of my 35 years as a collector.

The plane is a three-arm bridle plow which has an apple body, rosewood arms and inlays where the arms go through the body, ivory and ebony inlaid heart, ornate ivory tips, brass sunburst on the knob and brass “S’s” on the bridle. The plane cleaned up well and you can see why it’s my favorite tool.

If anyone knows of other planes with the Strode mark, please let me know.
The crucible process for producing cast steel was originated in England by Benjamin Huntsman in 1740. Fragments of blister steel and broken green glass were placed in a clay crucible, which was then sealed and heated by coke fires. Cast steel can be welded (to iron or steel), hardened and tempered; it's perfect for tools. Note that when you see "cast steel" on an old tool it does not mean that the item was cast, rather that it was forged from cast steel. Mercer gives a date of 1850 for the first cast steel tool in America, but another source says that the Collins Co. had cast steel axes in their 1826 price list.

In the Middle Ages (1000 - 1400 AD) there were four main categories of axes. Goodman describes them as the long and narrow felling axe, the T axe, the bearded axe, and the symmetric axe. Examples of the four types are shown in Photo 1. All are by French makers and all are felling axes except the T axe, which was used for hewing.

According to Mercer early European axes always had round handles and the bit always outweighed the poll. That's certainly true for the examples in Photo 1. For American-made axes the poll always outweighed the bit. Obviously Mercer meant felling axes and not hewing axes. The first felling axes in America were, of course, European, but local blacksmiths were soon making axes that were distinctively American. I'm not sure of the origin of the technique for making axes by wrapping the iron around an eye swage, welding it together, and then applying a steel edge, known as steeling. See two examples of eye swages in Photo 2.

In 1644 the Massachusetts Bay Company granted a 21-year, tax-free right to the Company of Undertakers of the Ironworks in New England. The "Undertakers" were required to establish an ironworks that was to have furnaces, forges, and mills. It was the first truly integrated factory in America, an extraordinary venture for its time. Hammer smith, as it was known, was set up on the Saugus River in Lynn in 1646 and went bankrupt in 1668. Among the reasons were that the process was more costly than anticipated and marketing was not successful. You can learn more about the Hammersmith restoration, The Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site, at www.nps.gov/sair/.

Kebabian tells us that the English Crown wanted the Colonies to ship raw materials to England, and to buy finished goods made in England. Enforcement was pretty lax and, not surprisingly, a 1740 investigation found that no axes had been shipped to the colonies for 18 years. This resulted in a law that prohibited forges and rolling mills in the colonies, but it was not really enforced. By the time of the Revolution more iron was being produced in the Colonies than in England.

Now I'd like to describe five of the axes in my collection:

Photo 3 shows Henry McKenna's felling axe, which has his name carved on the handle. This is an American felling axe from about 1850. It's marked O. Hunt & Co. and Doug-
las, the successor to Hunt. Note the brass cover at the end of the handle and the rope. The cover is stamped "3," which suggests there may have been other sizes, but I’ve never seen another. The rope through the handle is a mystery; perhaps Henry wrapped it around his arm? This axe has the weight and balance that’s required in an efficient felling axe, qualities that were evolved by the early colonial blacksmiths. A strong axeman is the other requirement.

Photo 3 also shows a hewing axe by William Weed of Cohoes, New York, from about 1860. The handle is canted for use by a right-handed axeman, and the blade is sharpened on only one side of the edge, as for most hewing axes. Hewing axes were used to square up a log after a felling axe had scored the log along its length to the desired depth as a guide for the hewer. I have a broad axe that’s sharpened on both sides. It’s a combination axe for rough work, such as a railroad tie, where it’s used to both score a log and to then hew it. It has a 10” applied edge and a short handle, similar to the more common hewing axe.

Photo 4 shows an axe that was the subject of a Chronicle article by Jack Kebabian. Its paper label from the first Cape Ann Historical Society reads "Hatchet supposedly made by Joseph Allen …1653 and ….. died …..1724 ...." The use of hatchet to describe the axe may have been because of its short, 21-inch handle. Kebabian found that there was indeed a blacksmith in Gloucester, Massachusetts named Joseph Allen who matched these dates. He was given a land grant and common grant in 1674, which was a common inducement to a prospective village blacksmith. Although the axe is not marked and its attribution can’t be proven, Kebabian states that if the foregoing is true this is the earliest American tool that can be attributed to a maker. When this axe came up at auction I was thinking Joseph might have been a relative. Turns out he wasn’t.

Photo 4 also shows a bodger’s axe. It was used to split out wood blanks, which would be sold to chairmakers to be turned into chair parts. I’ve read that bodgers often lived in the woods where their work was done. Anyway, the late James "Archie" Keillor, a New York executive and legendary collector wanted a bodger’s axe and communicated this need to a John Mayes in England. Mayes is mentioned a few times in Salaman. Keillor's collection was sold in a seven-day auction at his estate on Long Island, and the bodger's axe came to me via a CRAFTS auction years later. With the axe came a five-page, single-spaced, typed letter from Mayes to Keillor dated 1972, which described Mayes’ "quest" for the axe. Mayes contacted dealers and collectors with no success. He spent evenings in pubs drinking ale with the locals to gain their confidence, also without success. Then he visited blacksmiths’ shops, and finally came upon a blacksmith who allowed as though an old bodger had left an axe with him for resteeeling, and then "up and died." It was a Gilpin, "the only axe a self-respecting bodger would use." It was without a handle and it had not been resteeled, but the blacksmith allowed that the bodger's son still lived nearby. When Mayes visited the son to arrange a purchase, the son recalled that he had made handles for his father's axes and agreed to make another and fit it. The blacksmith resteeeled the axe, with Mayes opining that he was, "the last man on earth who could resteeel an axe." With deep apologies Mayes told Keiller that he would have to charge him the enormous sum of 6 pounds for the axe. (I wonder if that would have covered the ale he drank!)

Photo 5 shows a turpentine axe made by the Council Tool Co. of North Carolina. I found an old Chronicle article about turpentine, which included an 1853 story about the production of turpentine in North Carolina by Frederick Law Olmstead, the designer of New York's Central Park. Turpentine comes primarily from the sap of the Long Leaf Pine. The sap is collected in "boxes" (Continued from page 4) (Continued on page 6)
which are, in fact, cavities chopped in the base of the tree, up to four in a large tree, "using a long, narrow, axe from Connecticut." A mortising axe would seem right for this task. Boxes, which would hold about a quart of sap, were chopped in new trees during the winter, and those boxes would continue to be used for years. Then in March, a new tree would be cut or "hacked" just above the box to start the sap flowing into the box. Sap would soon congeal in the cut, so a "special axe" would be used to expose a new surface on the tree just above the previous one. This was repeated every 7 to 10 days. My guess is that this special axe was the one shown in Photo 5. Its 15" edge would do the job nicely, especially on a large tree. In the second and later years in production, a new cut with this axe would be made in March just above the highest cut from the previous year to start the sap flowing down into the box. After several years, Ohmstead reports, a ladder would be necessary to continue this series of cuts!

THE TWYBILL

The Twybill was named in England and may have come from its common name, the two bill. Salaman says they have not been used there for 300 years. The primary use of the twybill was to chop out mortises in building construction. Three different types are shown in Photos 5 and 6. Mercer says the American twybill in Photo 6 was used in New England in the 17th century and by Pennsylvania German carpenters until the end of the 19th century. The 48" twybill shown in Photo 5 is an unusual form of the French besaign in that one end is a gouge, rather than a second chisel end as is common. I've only seen two of these. In one catalog it was called a besaign d'escalier, whose use was claimed to be in shaping wreaths. Now we all know that a tool in a catalog is what the consignor says it is. But, escalier in French means stair (from which we obtain escalator). My knowing CRAFTS audience wouldn't buy either wreaths or stairs, but Bob Garay drew much support for his opinion that the gouge end could have been used to chop out round mortises. The hurdlemaker's (fencemaker's) twybill shown in Photo 6 is English and was used to chop out the section between two holes drilled in a hurdle post to accept a rail. When Herb Kean was able to answer all my questions about hurdles, some in the audience suspected a conspiracy. Indeed there was!

THE MORTISE CHISEL AXE

Mercer reported that he had interviewed a man who had seen the mortise chisel axe used by a German carpenter in the construction of a barn in PA around 1884. Photo 7 shows two types, one with a metal "handle" and one with a socketed, wooden handle. Some reports have the mortise chisel axe being hammered with a mallet. This would be natural for the wooden handled one, but the metal handled one would have to be held under the handle to hammer it. Chuck Granick wondered why one would not simply use a regular chisel instead of this awkward tool.

THE ADZE

The adze is really a slightly curved chisel or gouge with a vertical handle. The edge of the blade is sharpened on the handle side only, like the hewing axe. Long-handled adzes are called foot adzes and short-handled ones are called hand adzes. It has been said that the foot adze is the only tool that the devil fears to use.

Maybe that's why both forms of the tool became obsolete. The third tool in Photo 7 is a thrust axe, which is really a D-handled slick. It's included here because of its rarity. One marked by a Pennsylvania blacksmith went for over $1,000 in a recent auction. This one is unmarked and was much less costly!
The two adzes in the bottom corners of Photo 9 were made this way. Designs evolved to meet specialized needs such as for the carpenter, shipwright, cooper and bowlmaker.

Sockets for foot adzes were often rectangular and tapered to be larger at the top of the blade, with the end of the handle tapered to fit. In this way the blade could be dropped over the handle so that the blade could not come off in use. Also, the blade could easily be removed for sharpening. The handles of foot adzes, sometime after 1800, often had double curved handles such that the end of the handle would be directly above the edge of the blade. These were reportedly easier to use than adzes with straight handles. Most hand adzes have angled handles to achieve this same effect.

Photo 8 shows a carpenter's adze and two shipwright's adzes. All have a double-curved handle. The carpenter's adze by C.L. Anson of Rochester circa 1850 was used to smooth already hewed timbers or to make very rough timbers from a log, such as early rafters with only one side cut smooth to receive the roofing. In smoothing timbers the carpenter would straddle the timber with both hands at the end of the handle with arms against the thighs. The adze would be swung in roughly one-foot arcs, starting about two feet from the end of the work and working to the other end, then returning to the starting end to finish the job. Handle length, which was critical, would vary by worker. The shipwright's adze had a longer blade than the carpenter's adze and had a pin pole for driving spikes, so they would not interfere with the adzing. This adze would be used similar to the carpenter's adze on decking, but would be swung parallel to the body when working on planking. Two shipwright's adzes are shown in Photo 8; one has a curved edge and the other a straight edge. The former is by William Watts of New York City circa 1860. The latter one was patented by James Emerson in 1860, and made by Emerson & Silver of Trenton, New Jersey. The photo shows the Emerson adze taken apart. A block on the head fits into a socket on the handle and the two are held together by a tapered iron pin, which is just visible to the right of the head.

Two examples of the slot adze, stirrup adze, or Connecticut-type adze as they are randomly called are shown in Photo 9. One is French, the other Spanish. The French one is marked acier fondu (cast steel). They are very similar to the early Egyptian bronze adzes pictured in Goodman1, whose blades were strapped to wooden handles. This type of adze was the first tool to use a wedge to secure a blade and, as such, is the earliest stage in the development of the wooden plane.

Photo 10 shows a variety of hand adzes, whose functions were to carve out bowls, chair seats, or similar hollowing. Photo 11 shows a cooper's axe by Philip His, a Pennsylvania blacksmith, whose edge tools are extremely rare. Bill Phillips has several, which he steadfastly refuses to part with at any price. When I bought it, neither the New England seller or I knew anything about Philip His. In fact, it was listed as an axe by “Philiphis.” Note the ogee curve.
Cooper’s axe by Philip His, Berks County, Pennsylvania.


This is a comment on Jim Packham's article Nibs on Saws (June 2005 Tool Shed).

I have one of these saws with a nib. I cut a piece of wood with the saw and used the back of the saw with the nib to remove the resultant splinters from the cut. I also used the nib on a piece of wood cut with an electric saw. It was amazing how well the back of the saw with the nib cleaned the cut wood of splinters.

It is therefore my opinion that the nib had a definite purpose which was to remove the resultant splinters from where the wood was cut.

Sam Spector

**Latest eBay Scam**

In the past year or more, there have been numerous scam or “spoof” emails sent to eBay users in an effort to obtain their sensitive financial information, such as their password etc. They have given any number of reasons why you have to update your information, all of course false. If they catch an unaware eBay user in their trap, they bleed him as dry as they can, until he can stop it. There have been some horror stories involved here.

Their latest is even more confusing, and harder to detect. They claim that a high-priced item has been refused by the winning bidder for any number of reasons (the best being that he couldn’t raise the money). They offer it to the underbidder via eBay Second Chance bidding. Everything looks right, the seller’s ID, the eBay email - complete with all the proper graphics, boilerplate etc. Once in a while they start adding their own text and you can pick up grammatical and punctuation errors. But if they stay with the basics, it’s hard to tell from the real thing. Naturally, there is no Second Chance, and if you send them the money (they request it only by Western Union Money Transfer) you are a goner.

eBay has instituted a reasonably new method to tell whether any email is a scam. Previously you had to email to spoof@eBay.com to ask whether the email was truly sent by eBay. The answer sometimes took a day or two. Now all you have to do is go to your MY EBAY page and click on MY MESSAGES. This new area will show only messages that were sent by eBay personnel or a registered eBay user. If the message that you received in your regular email page is not also shown in MY MESSAGES, it is likely a spoof. You can then be absolutely sure by forwarding it to spoof@eBay.com, or contacting the true seller and buyer. If this saves you a problem in the future, you owe me a coffee and bagel.

----- Herb Kean
BOOK REVIEW - by Jack Whelan

EARLY PLANEMAKERS OF LONDON
Don & Anne Wing, (Published 2005 by The Mechanick’s Workbench, Marion, MA02738; 86 pp, $29.95+$4.00 Shipping)

Don and Anne Wing have contributed greatly to our knowledge of early planemaking development in England. Following on their clarification of the “Granfurdeus” mark (1), they have unearthed much new information from what might seem to be an unlikely source - the apprentice records of the Tallow Chandlers Company. Similar records of the Joiners and Ceilers Company have been a major source of earlier data, but the connection of candlemaking and planemaking seems obscure.

An obviously early plane stamped John Gilgrest prompted the Wings to make an internet search of apprentice names. This disclosed that the records of the Tallow Chandlers Company showed that Gilgrest was apprenticed to John Davenport in 1709, and that Gilgrest took as apprentice George Carpenter in 1717. Both Davenport and Carpenter are known planemakers. Don and Anne made many trips to London to explore this source, with spectacular results. In the period 1680-1750, there were as many planemakers in the Chandlers company as in the Joiners! This mother lode is still being worked, but the present book presents finds to date.

In addition to documenting dates for almost two dozen planemakers - many of whom were shadowy figures earlier - information on several score individuals connected with planemaking was derived from the Chandlers records. This, together with corresponding information from the Joiners Company, is summarized in a graphical Chronology. It is presented as a 19 x 22 inch wall chart bound with the volume. Another bar chart displays working dates for 37 planemakers between 1669 and 1750 as a fold-out, and a fold-out map of London locates the principal planemaking centers. These repay careful study!

The Wing’s description of life in London in the seventeenth century sets the stage for understanding the development of professional planemaking there. Making one’s own planes or buying Dutch planes served until the great fire of 1666 meant rebuilding the city. They also explain the reason for the discovery of planemakers in the records of unlikely guilds. Membership in one of these companies gave one the “freedom of the city”, permission to work within the walls of London and to vote. There were some 80 such companies, jealous of their power. Becoming a member was possible in one of three ways: complet-

Dear Tool Wizard,

Enclosed are two photos of some gauges that I had for some time. I was told they were cooper's gauges. Are they? And what are the marks for? And why are the marks closer together at the top of the gauge? Thank you.

Jack Crystal,  
Carson City, Nevada

Dear Jack,

Yes they are cooper's gauges, used to measure the curvature of the staves, once the barrel is bent. But here's where we part company. I DON'T KNOW WHAT THOSE MARKS ARE FOR!! My guess is that they have to do with volume vs. size, and they are "logarithmic" in spacing because I believe the curvature of the barrel yields a logarithmic function of volume.

Sooo-- I'm stumped for the first time in my 235 years as Wizard.

Should anyone know the answer, please do not write to Jack. Tell me and let me get the credit.

The Chagrined Wizard

Winchester on Parade

Not much is known about the picture on the left. It appears to be an advertising display or a parade float or maybe both, constructed by the R. Barcroft and Sons Co. Winchester Store. Winchester began selling hand tools in addition to sporting goods in the early 1920s. This ill fated venture into the tool business seems to have been done in by the Depression and was finished by 1931. - ED.
MEMORIES

A month or so ago I ran across a very odd “tool” that not too many people could identify. As you can see from the photo, it is rather plain and uninteresting looking. Consequently, there wasn’t very much bidding, except for me. The memories rushed back when I saw it, and I would have bought it at any price. (Well, almost any price.)

Not to keep you in suspense, it is: -- the iron reinforcing tip of the springboards used to elevate the sawyers on the “big trees” to get them above the “swell” of the trunk. Disappointed? Did you think it was for splitting diamonds? The length of the longest hand saw blade that we had back then was 12 feet (three blades welded together). The bars for the chain saws were much smaller. When the trees had a swell at the bottom, we had a choice: cut into the sides for clearance, or cut about 6 to 8 feet up where the swell was much less. As we were on piece work (paid by the board footage cut) it was an efficiency choice for us, and rarely did we care about the conservation end of it, or the questions that would come from the future class trips asking about the high stumps.

Forged Iron, 9” long and 3/8” thick.

We would drive 2 or 3 of these boards into deep cuts in the side of the tree, providing steps up to the final board that we would be standing on when sawing the back cut or cutting out the undercut. Those forged iron tips gave us a great feeling of security on the topmost platform boards.

Sometimes the tree would kick the board loose and fall on it making a pile of splinters. We were usually too lazy to unscrew the tip and put it on a new board. We had plenty of extra tips, down at the loading rig. I suspect that someday a family camping in one of the reforested areas will find a few of these and wonder what they were used for. Too bad everyone doesn’t subscribe to The Tool Shed.

The interesting (and dangerous) part of cutting on the springboard was the exit maneuver. It was all done by sound. When the wedges were driven into the backcut deep enough to keep the saw from binding, it was just a question of getting the “hinge” (the wood left between the backcut and the undercut) equal in thickness on both sides, so the tree would fall just where it was planned. This was done by a lot of shouting between the power-end guy and the stinger-end guy, as neither one could see the other. On the really big trees with the long chain saw bars, the last inch or so was done with the hand saw. When the hinge was around 4”, you could expect to hear that ominous “crack”. Just one at first, then a sort of rumble. It didn’t pay to wait for the rumble. If you were too early and had to come back, that was better than having to jump at the last minute or lose your saw in the kickout. Only in the movies did they yell “timber” in the Big Trees. Everyone knew when one of those giants was on its way down.

On the big ones, one guy would remove his handle of the hand saw so the other guy could pull the blade through and throw it to the ground. Meanwhile the 200 foot “king of the mountain” was on its way down. If you did it right, you had plenty of time to get down and witness the contact with the ground and the bed of crisscrossed saplings that you had prepared to soften the crushing blow. You could play it safe by pulling the saw out before the crack, and driving the wedges in deeper to start it moving. However, if you guessed wrong on how much hinge was left all the way across, you stood the chance of splitting the tree from the hinge up.

Splitting of the butt log because it fell wide and hit a rock, or

(Continued on page 12)
went over with too large a hinge, was costly to you when the scalers came through to tally the usable board feet (which was converted into your pay).

I have seen a power guy come sailing to the ground because the end of his board didn’t have an iron tip to dig into the bark. (Most bark on the big ones was 8 to 12 inches thick.) Lucky for him his 125 pound power-end was still up in the cut. We stinger-end guys generally didn’t have that problem, but I used those tips religiously. And I’m here today to prove it.

(Continued from page 11)