Does every tool have a story to tell? Often, when I come into possession of an antique or vintage tool, I can’t help but wonder who used it and does it have a history to share. Not until three tools came along, and individually joined my collection, do I now know that tools, with some research, can and do tell a story.

It all started with a pair of lasting pliers. As many readers know, lasting pliers were utilized primarily by shoe makers and cobblers. These particular pliers are imprinted as follows: on the one-piece top jaw and bottom handle is, “UNION”, “Patented Oct. ’25, 1887” and “’12”; on the opposing one-piece bottom jaw and top handle are, “WHITCHER 4” and “UNION MADE”. Finally, attached to the bottom jaw is a hammer head, found on most lasting pliers, and on the side of the hammer head is imprinted, “UNION” under which are also the words, “UNION MADE”.

One tool, and the words “Union” and “Union Made” - four times. This sure piqued my curiosity. Many of us remember the advertising jingle, “Look for the Union Label”, popular from 1975 to 1992. Well, during my 25 years of tool collecting, I do not recall ever seeing a single vintage or antique hand-tool with any form of union imprint or label, or recognition of being union made. Furthermore, I’ve always thought of unions as a post WWI phenomenon. Given the 1887 patent date and the possibility that the “’12” is the year of manufacture (1912), these pliers were most likely manufactured during the last decade of the 19th century or just after the first decade of the 20th. This was worth further research - to find the connection between this lone tool, its union imprint, labor unions and the Frank W. Whitcher Company.

Frank W. Whitcher Company, Boston, MA and the Shoe Findings Industry

As defined in his thorough treatise, ‘The Shoe Industry’, by Frank J. Allen; published by Henry Holt and Co., 1922, “Shoe findings comprise all the parts used as accessories to boot and shoe manufacture, retail trade and repair”. Included in his list of findings is everything from laces to eyelets, shoe forms to shoe polish and an enormous variety of repairing tools - knives, lap stones, shoe hammers, awls and needles, to mention a few. To quote Mr. Allen, “Findings accompany the shoe from its beginning until it is worn out by the consumer”. The

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NEXT MEETING
November 8, 2009 – 1PM
HOST Masonic Lodge Highbridge, NJ
Please mark your calendar
Collectors of Rare and Familiar Tools Society of New Jersey

President BOB GARAY, Hopatcong, NJ
e-mail, takeadip@optonline.net

Vice President DON KAHN, Hackensack, NJ

Secretary ANNETTE VLIET, Danielsville, PA

Treasurer HANK ALLEN, Glen Rock, NJ

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: Hank Allen, 524 Harristown Rd. Glen Rock, NJ 07452 (write check payable to CRAFTS of New Jersey).

CRAFTS of NJ meetings are held at the HOST Masonic Lodge in High Bridge, N.J.

Take 1-78 to Route 31 exit at Clinton. Go north on Route 31, two miles to second traffic light at the High Bridge exit. Turn right and go about half a mile to Dennis Avenue. 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 four times a year for members of CRAFTS of New Jersey. Editor: Jim Bode, P.O. Box 372, Claverack, N.Y. 12513
e-mail- Jim@JimBodeTools.com

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
Douglas Follweiler Springtown, NJ
Carl Heidersberger Whitehouse, NJ
Roscoe McBride Winchester, VA
Richard Niedermayer Piscataway, NJ
David Prentis Newfield, NJ
John & Cynthia Scansarole Sarasota, FL
Ron Schiaffo Scotch Plains, NJ
Richard Weymer Strasburg, PA
Roy Ysla Baltimore, MD
Quirr Murk Siletz, OR

President’s Corner

Just back from vacation at the Jersey Shore and ready to wrap up the summer. It has been a busy summer as I was able to build a shed and refinish my boathouse. These jobs took many weeks of work but the outcome was well worth it. As I was working my neighbor asked my wife, do I ever take a break. I thought about this and realized that I don’t really consider this work, but an enjoyable hobby. I really enjoy building things and using tools to create. When I was on vacation I built two picnic tables for the owner of the house because I got bored sitting at the beach. They thought I was crazy but I really enjoyed it. That is what makes tool collecting so much fun, I enjoy cleaning and repairing the old tools used by our ancestral craftsman. When something puzzles me, like how a tool was used or information on a maker I also enjoy researching to discover the answer. Most people will not understand this but I think you can. That is why being in a club like CRAFTS is so special – you also enjoy tools and the way craftsmen used them.

I am looking forward to the CRAFTS picnic to renew old acquaintances. Of course there will be plenty of tailgating and tool displays but the tales of new found discoveries will fill the day. Consider bringing a display as prizes are exceptional again. Don’t forget to bring a desert to share.

This summer our new director Stew May has taken on the position of CRAFTS communications. He handled the dues notice in July and the picnic notice in August. A new effort is to get members emails so we can more easily communicate with you. If you have not sent in your dues or email address please send them to Hank Allen. (Address to left)

As I look forward to going back to school I know I have a lot of preparing to do. I have been fortunate enough to have a district that supports our shop/technology program. We are actually expanding and updating our program. Where I teach we are offering a variety of courses for students in grades 6-8. Many schools have closed down their programs thinking they have no value. It is up to people like you who realize the value of understanding our technology of the past and strengthening our technological edge today to speak to your town’s schools. You could give presentations in the classroom or talk to Board of Educations on the importance of “Hands-on” in the schools. Even a letter to your school’s superintendent might gain attention to the issue. Our country’s economy depends on this rekindling of craftsmanship and hands-on engineering. OK, I will now get down off my soap box. Hope to see you at the picnic!

Is this your last Tool Shed? It is if the address label says, Expires June 2009. Renew your membership today.
center of the shoe finding industry, during the 19th and early 20th centuries, was Boston, MA. and surrounding cities, most notably Lynn, MA.

The book also references the industry’s beginnings... "The earliest known date for findings manufacture and business in the United States was 1826. A firm was established in Boston that year by John Tillson. That firm still exists today as the Frank W. Whitcher Company, whose head is regarded as the leading authority upon the findings industry in this country today".

So who was Frank W. Whitcher? The ‘Who’s Who in New England’, edited by Albert Nelson Marquis, 1909 & 1916, lists Frank Weston Whitcher as being born on November 11, 1855 in Tilton, NH. Mr. Allen’s book adds that the Tillson Company took the Whitcher name in 1875, although it doesn’t explain the circumstances. Although very young, it was only five years later that Mr. Whitcher’s shoe sizing rule was patented on April 13, 1880, bearing testimony to his abilities, as did the success and duration of his company, in business under his leadership until at least 1922.

While my own copy of this rule does not have a union label, I have seen them on eBay with the ‘Union Made’ imprint. So, one union tool has become two and the connection to the Whitcher Company becomes stronger. Given that the pliers and rule were very different products, produced by very different trades, one can only assume that they were produced in a different shop or section of the same factory. Did the craftsmen belong to the same union or two different ones? Even if these tools were produced by another firm for Whitcher, we still have the union question.

**Labor Unions in the U.S.**

For centuries, Europe had its guilds, groups of “Master” craftsmen who worked alongside journeymen and apprentices. The craftsmen controlled the guilds and only when an apprentice or journeyman advanced to “Master” did he benefit from the guild. This was the case in the early U.S. shoe industry with Master, Apprentice and Journeyman, in shops that were often no larger than 12’ by 12’. By the early 1800s, increasing industrialization in the U.S. created a need for something different. Unions covered a wider variety of employees, both skilled and unskilled. There were some large scale unions in mining and printing, for example, as well as numerous, much smaller craft and trade groups.

As it turns out, unions and trade groups in the U.S. had their start in the early 19th century, much earlier than referenced at the beginning of this article. During the period we are focused on, the percent of the industrial workforce belonging to a union was as follows: 1880 - 1.8% (160,000), 1900 - 7.5% and 1914 - 10.5%. Craft unions took hold in small urban shops using technologies that still depended on traditional specialized skills. This included printers, furniture makers, jewelry makers, iron molders, engineers, machinists, plumbers and railroad crafts.

**The Union Label**

In 1874, one year before the Frank W. Whitcher Company came into being, the Cigar Makers Union was the first to persuade manufacturers to place a union label in each box of cigars. Printers unions like, ‘The New York Printers’ Union’, founded in 1850, have a long history of placing union labels on almost everything they produced - the first appearing in the
October 15, 1891 edition of the, ‘Compositors Typographical Journal’.

Knights of Saint Crispin (1867 to 1874)

So, why the Frank W. Whitcher Company and why the shoe making and finding industry? One answer could be that from 1867 to 1874, the largest national union in the U.S. was the ‘Knights of Saint Crispin’, organized on March 1, 1867 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin by Newell Daniels and six associates. The Knights of St. Crispin represented shoemakers and supporting industries (shoe findings). At its peak, membership numbered upwards of 50,000.

The Crispins, as they were known, were named after St. Crispin, the patron saint of shoemakers. Membership included Cordwainers, possibly the original name for shoe maker. According to the Honourable Cordwainer's Company, a modern guild of boot and shoemakers and its allied trades (find them at - http://www.the-hcc.org/), the Cordwainer worked with new leather and created shoes, while the cobbler worked with old shoes and their repair. There have long been differences of opinion on this, especially from the cobblers of the time. This site will also give you additional information on the story of Saint Crispin.

That leads us to the third tool in my collection; also from the Whitcher Company...a cobbler's hammer with the imprint, "#3 Crispin, Trade Mark, Hand Forged, Tool Steel, Whitcher, Boston". Why did the Whitcher Company, founded in 1875, use the Crispin name after the union's demise in 1874? Was it to honor the 'Knights of St. Crispin'? Was it out of respect for its own workers? Given the origin of the name, did Mr. Whitcher feel that he too was part of the great shoe making tradition of St. Crispin and that he too was a Crispin?

I draw the following conclusions: The Whitcher factory and its craftsman were unionized, or at least part of a trade organization. Its employees were most likely once a part of the Knights of St. Crispin and probably belonged to one of the later unions like the 'Knights of Labor'. We already know that the union imprint appeared on various Whitcher products suggesting, at the very least, that he respected his workers and their right to organize. While one can only guess, I would also suggest that Mr. Whitcher had the shoe finding and shoe making business in his blood and placed the name Crispin, as a trade mark on at least one of his products, as a tribute to the tradition and to the patron saint of his trade. Another possibility, being the businessman that he was, Mr. Whitcher may have used the Crispin name as a good sales technique, selling to the shoe making and repair companies, craftsmen and to tens of thousands of 'Crispin' workers.

In case you are wondering, and since I’ve been asked several times, the evidence clearly leads me to conclude that these tools have nothing to do with the Union Tool Company, Union, N.J. or the Union that fought in the Civil War.

Questions that remain:

If you have additional information please forward it to me at >Mayhemsra@0ptonline.net<. Perhaps we’ll have a short follow-up article and fill-in some of the following blanks:

• Further documentation of the Whitcher Company's union connection.
• Which unions did the Whitcher employees belong to; which trades were unionized and when?
• Did the Frank W. Whitcher Company actually produce its own tools or was this contracted to other companies?
• When did the Whitcher Company terminate business, either entirely or as part of a merger or sale? When did Frank W. Whitcher himself pass from the scene?
• Finally, do you have a vintage or antique tool with a union label?

Other Sources

1. Labor Unions in the United States, Gerald Friedman, U. of Massachusetts at Amherst
The June meeting turned out to be a delightful day. The sun was shining, allowing plenty of tailgating for members and guests. By 1:00 we had seen our share of tools and moved inside to start the presentation. CRAFTS member Wil Goldschmidt was presenting - Confessions of a Bowl Turner. I have always enjoyed lathe turning so I made sure I had a close seat, as he had brought his small Jet lathe for the demonstration.

He started by telling us that lathe turning is in his blood as his father received a lathe for Christmas in 1933. His father made his own chisels from files and old power hack saw blades. During WWII he was commissioned to make 500 incendiary bomb models for the military. Wil helped his father by marking the centers for turning. About forty years ago Wil got a three-phase Walker Turner lathe that he converted to single phase. Frustrated with the Craftsman chisels that came with the lathe, his father made a set of scraper chisels.

Wil's presentation was guided by his chart, "CONFessions of a BOWL turnER". He declared that he "likes wood", all kinds. Wood with defects and unique features keep his bowls interesting. Many of his bowls include the original bark, knots, burls and other defects many woodworkers shy away from. Of course he also likes tools. He has even made tools of his own design to assist with his passion for bowl turning. He created a unique articulating curved tipped chisel by first making a prototype out of wood to figure out the complexity. When bowl turning he says he "likes designs that please him", following classical shapes and form. He is not led in his designs by wall thickness, laminations or other turning "tricks". He says that Bowl turning "can be exciting", as often large chunks fly off, or the whole bowl explodes. He notes that often his turnings may incorporate a repair to fix such a predicament or to make a natural problem functional.

Wil starts his bowls by drilling a flat spot with a 3 1/2" Fostner bit on what will be the top of the bowl. This gives him a spot to mount a small face plate with screws to the top that will later be cut out to be the inside of the bowl. Then he turns the bottom and outside shape of the bowl. The bottom is sized to attach to a special bowl turning chuck. Then the inside is turned. Wil uses a scraping technique that takes the wood off fast and leaves a smooth turning for final sanding. Wil says he sands his bowls a lot to get the desired appearance. He likes to finish his bowls with Waterlux bowl finish.

It was a lively presentation as Wil gave me a chance to try the scraping technique myself. There was plenty of discussion as all members asked questions about his techniques and tools used. I enjoyed seeing the variety of bowls Wil had on display. The presentation gave me plenty of inspiration to try some of the new techniques he presented. I am sure other members felt the same way.
By Tom Lamond®

The Washoe Tool Manufacturing Company is reputed to have started in Newburgh, New York around 1860. Sparse and conflicting information indicates that the date could have been anywhere between 1860 and 1868. The company relocated to Newark, New Jersey in 1871 or 1872 but they were there for only a couple of years. In 1874 they relocated again, this time to Staten Island, New York. Their catalog of 1874 indicated that Hogan, Clark & Sleeper of Boston, Massachusetts were the sole agents for the product lines produced by the Washoe Tool Co.

On October 24, 1876 a company by the name of Lathrop & Co. was issued a registration for the brand name WASHOE. Lathrop & Co. were located in Newark, New Jersey and indicated the brand applied to railroad, mining, contractors, carpenters and other edge tools. The Trade Mark Registration was signed by Stephen Park Lathrop. It is presumed that there was a connection between the Washoe Tool Co. and Lathrop & Co. Perhaps Lathrop & Co. were the new agents or they purchased the Washoe Tool Co. to fulfill the high demands they had for the type tools Washoe was making.

According to a statement printed in the 1889 supplement to the 1888 Fayette R. Plumb Catalog, the Washoe Tool Co. was purchased by Fayette R. Plumb in the later part 1888 so that Plumb could expand their capacity for manufacturing adzes and picks. It is not known if the facility in Staten Island continued to produce tools but Plumb did state that he had ... “erected new shops and improved the equipment.” Indications suggest the new shops were in Frankfurt, Pennsylvania and the equipment was relocated to that facility from Staten Island.

In addition to some axes the company made other forged tools including scythes. Their primary lines of goods included various designs of picks, mattocks, grub hoes and striking hammers. The label that was associated with the company bore the rather detailed image of a rhinoceros standing in grass. The words TRADE MARK were included in an arc toward the upper portion of the label. Remnants of original paper labels indicate that the original color of the labels was brick red with black lines.

At this point not much is known about Lathrop & Co. and the Washoe Tool Mfg. Co., but a connection is certainly suggested. Any additional materials, including information, labels and/or markings related to WASHOE and/or LATHROP & CO. will be appreciated.

Please contact: Tom Lamond or Tom@Yesteryearstools.

NEWBURGH, NEW YORK  1860-1872
NEWARK, NEW JERSEY  1872-1874
STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK  1874-1888+

The Tool Shed September 2009
6
I came upon this particular wood plane while checking out some antique co-op shops. There was one booth, with a respectable grouping of old tools, which caught my attention having numerous wood planes. After reviewing the group, I selected two to take up to the check out counter. One of these planes (images to the right), on routine inspection appears to be a common Gardner & Murdock, Boston, Green Street, molding plane (the blade is at a higher pitch angle than normally found and looks like a cabinet pitch of 60 degrees) but upon closer examination the almost complete name of “R. Slayton” (missing the last letter “n”) appears on the end of the screwed-on applied side piece (left hand side of the plane) that helps form the lower portion of the cutting profile. R. Slayton is an unrated maker’s mark that is believed to date from about 1810 (AWP 4th Ed). This plane’s profile has most likely been worked on as the sole is slightly rough and the profile is somewhat crude. There is evidence of an applied pencil line but there are no maker’s layout lines (spring lines) on the heel or toe that would confirm an earlier or different profile. Although the profile is suspect, the wood and finish on both the plane body and the left hand applied side piece with the three screws, appears to be old and from the same period and not recently substituted or modified. It’s only upon close inspection of the “Green Street.” stamp, where you can see that the right hand corner edge of the stamp’s border is just overlapping on the other applied piece of birch wood. That would lead you to conclude both pieces of wood were together when Gardner & Murdock made the strike. And also that the plane body would appear to be original with the exception of the probable modified cutting profile. (In addition, just below the applied piece, on the main body, there may be some additional very light lettering, possibly inverted and half cut off, which I am unable to make out as of this writing). It would appear that Gardner & Murdock made this plane by reworking other existing planes. The reworking of other maker’s planes is not unheard of but the curious question is how R. Slayton might have had a connection to Gardner & Murdock. One possible scenario is that R. Slayton might have been a predecessor of Gardner & Murdock or of the earlier Gardner and Brazer. With Gardner and Brazer having only been in operation for one year (1825) it could be possible that when Gardner and Murdock succeeded Gardner and Brazer in 1825, at the same address (AWP 4th Ed.), there were still some R. Slayton planes in the shop, which were then reworked by Gardner and Murdock. While this is only one possible unverified explanation, it would appear that the R. Slayton maker’s mark could possibly have been established in the Boston area and adds credibility to Slayton as a plane maker. While not an exotic plane, it is an interesting piece of a larger puzzle for those who continue to research and record knowledge of the early plane makers.

View of front of Gardner & Murdock plane

Both sides of Gardner & Murdock plane

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JUST A NOTE to advise anyone interested that I have just added a number of articles and other information to the web site Yesteryears tools.com Thanks, Tom Lamond - Tom@yesteryearstools.com

WANTED: Large Spear & Jackson hand saw blade with good teeth. Does not need handle.
Bob Garay takeadip@optonline.net
I reviewed a package of new publications from EAIA and found them of interest to CRAFTS members. /Bob Garay

The Directory of American Toolmakers

CD adaptation

The original print version first published in 1990 is long out of print and almost impossible to find. This updated CD version is as good if not better than the printed version. It is the largest source of information on North American toolmakers ever compiled. With over 1,200 pages containing over 14,000 entries and over 5000 supplemental names dating back to as early as 1636, together with cross-references, indexes, and lists of primary and secondary sources, this is an invaluable work for the tool collector. The heart of the directory is its main list which includes maker’s names, the geographic location of the maker as well as the work location(s), the working years of the maker, the tool types are separated into 73 categories, and description of the marks on the tools. It is very easy to navigate and find maker’s information. In reality I found myself just browsing the many different areas. I liked the State Listings Annex where it listed all the documented makers by state. It also includes some bonus articles from the Chronicle. Well worth the price.

DVD The Chronicle 1933-2007
Volumes 1-60

I am very excited about this collection of the Chronicle volumes. I have spent many years devouring every bit of printed material on tools history I could find. Now my wife will never get me off the computer. I am glad I have a lap top. Best viewed in Adobe Reader 8 or 9, you’ll be able to Fast Search the entire DVD from one search window, or Fast Search individual volumes as needed. I can look up articles by subject, author, or text search. It has a fully bookmarked Home Page to make navigating the DVD fast and easy. I highly recommend this DVD; it is astounding.

A Pattern Book of Tools and Household Goods

This is a beautifully crafted reproduction of a pattern book probably issued by W. & C. Wynn of Birmingham about 1820. It contains 83 copperplates of tools, including 9 fold out plates, all at full size. The plates depict hundreds of tools and household goods. As a bonus, each book has a back pocket containing a reprint of an 1810 W. & C. Wynn price list that closely matches the pattern book. This work is similar to the pattern book artwork shown in Kenneth Robert’s book—“TOOLS FOR THE TRADES AND CRAFTS” except this one is full scale. The art work is magnificant with attention to the manufacturing details. A fine coffee table book with a lengthy introduction by Jane Rees.

More information about the above three publications can be found at the EAIA website - www.EAIAinfo.org

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Patented Transitional & Metallic Planes in America, 1827-1927, (Vol. I), Roger K. Smith, 1981. 8 1/2” x 11”, hardcover, 340 pp., 350 superb photos-41 in full color. Covers all the basic information on patented planes. Important information on Bailey and Stanley. Biographical data and photos of many inventors and manufacturers. Production Type Studies for Stanley planes. Rare plane catalogs reproduced. Although first published in 1981, this book has not become obsolete. It has been the “bible” for hundreds of collectors, dealers, auctioneers and historians. Six thousand copies have been sold. It is now out of print, and second-hand copies sell for $200+ on ebay. We have a limited number of mint copies available now at $130.00 each. post paid.


Order from Roger K. Smith, P.O. Box 177, Athol, Mass. 01331
See www.rogerksmith.com for other publications.
Since the 1950's when I began collecting antique tools I have acquired a number of miniature planes. The first of these was a three-inch long block plane given to me by a fellow collector, not because it was a miniature, but rather because it was ink stamped with an advertisement for a firm in Farnum, Nebraska (See photo 1). This town was probably settled by my ancestors since most Farnhams in no matter how they spelled their name, were descendants of my great grandfather, Ralph Farnham, who sailed from Southampton, England on April 6, 1635, and after a voyage of 58 days landed in Boston.

One side of the plane reads “Compliments of the season, / AINLAY BROS. / Farnam, Nebr.” On the other side is printed “FIRE, LIFE, AND ACCIDENT INSURANCE. / TITLES PERFECTED, ABSTRACTS BLOCKED/ REAL ESTATE AND FARM LOANS.” Die stamped in a circle in the 5/8” square toe of the plane is “ADVERTISING RESULTS CO. CHICAGO.” And within an inner circle “PAT./APPLIED/FOR.” Considering the size of this plane it carries a great deal of information. This plane and some others like it were advertising giveaways dating from the first half of the twentieth century. Besides being fine promotional tools they also performed the practical task of sharpening. Not all of these small planes were produced in the United States. One in my collection is 2˝ in length, and stamped into the top of its wooden body is “PERRY & CO/ PATENT/LONDON.” (See photo 2) On the face of its 5/8” long cutting iron is stamped the image of a buxom mermaid who appears to be holding a hand mirror. Some of these little planes carry no advertising or the identifying marks, but appear to have been produced for the sole purpose of sharpening. Though many are well finished as if made commercially of fine woods, others look homemade even primitive. One beautiful 2” plane, which I purchased at the CRAFTS auction two years ago, appears to have been fashioned completely in bronze. (See photo 3) It is one of my favorite sharpeners. Extremely well made it looks as though it were created by a fine craftsman as one of a kind or in a limited production.

Greg Welsh has in his outstanding collection some of the finest small planes that I have seen. Among them is a 3” long primitive with a tiny wooden block holding its ancient appearing homemade iron. (See photo.4) It is a rather unique and possibly served some other function than sharpening pencils. However, it could have been used for that purpose.

Another in Greg's collection is a 2” in length and 17/32” in width. (See photo 5) Its body is of rosewood and the iron, the top of which does not protrude above the throat, is held by a round headed screw. Identical to one in my collection in its dimensions,
design, and type of cutting iron, the only outstanding difference is that Greg’s has stamped into its top just behind the iron, “PAT. APD FOR.” While mine has nothing stamped into the mahogany. He also has a plane the toe of which bears the logo of Advertising Results Co. (See photo 6) On its left side is printed, “WISCONSIN DAIRY FARMER INCORPORATED/ (INCORPORATED 1905)/ ROBERT A.N BALTZ, PRESIDENT.” Printed on the right side is “BUTTER-CHEESE-EGGS/CHICAGO, ILL/ NEW YORK CITY/N.Y./ALGOMA, WIS/ GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.”

These pencil sharpening planes at one time may have been somewhat common, but during my years of collecting not many have come my way. In Roger K. Smith’s book Patented Transitional & Metallic Planes in America 1827 – 1927, he shows only one of these small planes on page 210. I find them very interesting and quite useful.

Upcoming Tool Events

Sept 5-6 - Stormville Airport Fleamarket, Stormville, NY
Sept 8-12 - Brimfield Flea Mkt, Brimfield, Mass.
Sept 13 - CRAFTS picnic, Brady Camp, NJ
Sept 17-19 - Martin Donnelly Live Free or Die Tool Auction, Nashua, NH
Sept 26 - David Stanley Tool Auction, England
Oct 3 - Spicers Tool Auction, Kingstown, RI
Oct 10 - EAIA Meeting Tuckerton Seaport, NJ, Carl Bopp
www.tuckertonseaport.com
Oct 15 - Tony Murland Tool Auction, England
Oct 16-17 - Martin Donnelly Live Free or Die Tool Auction, Indianapolis, IN
Oct 23 24 - Brown’s 35th Antique Tool Sale & Auction, Harrisburg, PA
Oct 29-31 - MWTCA National Meet Indianapolis, IN
Nov. 8 - CRAFTS meeting, Host Masonic Lodge, Highbridge, NJ
AN EGG CANDLER?

Boy, this one pushes my memory, it was so long ago. But it was so ridiculous that I can’t forget it. Yes, it was on one of our Sunday rides. I’ve been told that I have been on more Sunday rides than there are Sundays. That’s quite an exaggeration of course, but the point is well taken. It seems that all my tales happen on the Sunday rides. The logic of it is — that’s the most likely time of my week that tools come into play. If you really pressed me if this egg candler episode happened on a Saturday or a Sunday, I would have to admit I don’t really know. Enough said.

I do remember that it was in New York state, close enough to come home for the night. It was around 5:00 and when I saw the sign at the end of this long driveway that said, “Old Farm Equipment and Tools”, Doris warned me that if we made too many stops we would have to take a motel. A motel that close to home, NEVER. So I agreed that this would be the last stop before dinner.

We maneuvered up the rut-filled driveway and parked in front of the barn. There certainly were pieces of farm equipment there. You could hardly make your way through them all to get into the barn. Inside were tools OK, but primitive, rusty, broken — and you know the drill, all were “priceless”.

After a few minutes of my walking by all these “priceless” artifacts, the guy finally got the idea that I didn’t believe him. First he got a little grumpy, and then as if an idea just crossed his mind, he lit up with a smile. “I got jist the thing fer ya”, he mumbled as he whizzed off to the rear of the barn. Back he came with this “watchamahcallit”. See Photo 1.

Well, I grew up in a semi-suburban area just outside of Newark, NJ, and what little I knew about farming I picked up from my travels and from Penn State (in the heart of Nittany Valley). So when he told me that it was a very rare egg candler, I had no experience to draw on to say otherwise. I did, however, ask him how it worked, and got the most elaborate explanation any human could come up with. I had learned from prior experiences that an overdrawn explanation is probably more bull than truth. (I don’t want you to turn this back around on me the next time I string out an answer.)

Then came the bargaining for something that he knew I wasn’t familiar with, but frankly had no use for. It intrigued me to the point that I bought it. Then the explanation to Doris. I cut about 75% of his story out, but kept it as an egg candler. To Doris it was just another old rusty piece of junk.

Now for those of you city-folk, I will tell you what an egg candler does. And this is only after looking it up when I got home. When the hen and the rooster get together and the farmer wants to know whether the egg is fertile or not, he shines a bright light behind the egg in a darkened room. If he sees tiny spider-like veins in the egg, they are the blood veins of the embryo chick. He allows those eggs to hatch. Otherwise they go to market as just a dozen eggs.

There is another reason for candling. And that is to prevent any “blood eggs” to get into the hands of the consumer, as the blood veins were considered icky to eat. None of this did I know.

But I was smart enough to realize that this mechanism had nothing to do with candling. It took me some time to finally find out what it did.

First— its name: eprouvette (from the French, as they invented it, I think.) Its purpose was to sample gunpowder to tell whether it was strong enough to propel a ball from a musket, or so strong that it might cause damage to the weapon. (In more recent times, a mortar was used with a

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certain weighted charge and the distance the shell flew was measured.)

With this hand-held tester, the lid is lifted by pushing the long flat spring down to disengage the toothed wheel. Under the lid is a vertical hole in the brass dowel. It is loaded with the gunpowder to be tested, as you would load a pipe bowl. There is also a tiny hole at the bottom of the bowl for a thin fuse string, which comes out to a recess in the bottom plate of the bowl, where some powder can be placed to help the fuse get through the opening in the bowl. See Photo 2. Now, all you do is light the fuse and see how far upward the lid explodes. Back then, it was probably lit by holding it over a candle, hence the shot-in-the-dark guess as a candler. The toothed wheel has numbers marked at each position. It took me a couple tries with the innards and fuses of some firecrackers, but I finally got it to explode to the middle position.

I have since had this looked at by some antique firearms people, and they all say it is American. None gave me any good reason for this deduction - just, “It looks it.” (Probably because the French ones were very ornate). They claim that during the Revolution (ours not France’s) there were some pretty unsavory gunpowder salesmen, that went from town to town selling to either side. They had a habit of loading dirt etc. in with the powder to give it more volume, as it sold by the keg. It wasn’t until some Frenchman recommended that we use éprouvettes that this practice faded out. Maybe it was Lafayette.

Anyway, I have demonstrated it at Historical Societies talks that I have given over the years. When it works, everyone oohs and ahhs and believes me. When it fails to explode, they all look sour and I suspect that they feel it was a tall tale. These éprouvettes have been explained in auctions and dealer catalogs for many years, but they still makes a pretty good what-is-it. ■