The TOOL SHED

NUMBER 48 SEPTEMBER 1987

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ANTIQUE-TOOL AUCTION PRICES: 1979-1987

by Herb Kean

The other day I read an article about baseball cards. Now, I'm not putting down another collectible, but this article did raise a few questions. It stated that there are recorded sales of $25,000 for a single card, and the highest book value of a single card is $34,000. How can you compare a baseball card with an ivory-tipped, center-wheel plow plane? Yet, the center-wheel only brought $8,000, and that represents a national record for an antique tool!

Don't bother explaining to me that tool collecting is "comparatively new," because I don't think it's any newer than baseball cards. For sheer intrinsic value, there aren't many collectibles that have more going for them than antique tools. The difference is desirability. Pound for pound, production hour for production hour, or for just plain good looks, I'll put my tools up against decoys any day. But the record decoy is $319,000!

The reason for the lag in tool desirability is not clear cut. (If it was, I think more would have been done about it.) There have been many debates in an effort to pinpoint the answer. In the past years a couple of dozen serious-minded dealers and collectors have taken constructive steps in an effort to upgrade tools. But in 1985 and 1986, despite the good intentions, antique-tool auction prices depreciated.

I'm not going to reopen the debate as to why. It will be a source of a later article. I am going to devote the rest of this article to some good news. There is a renaissance. I've been talking about it since Harry O'Neill's auction last November, but now I believe it's really here. The data presented below show a definite upswing in 1987. Viva la renaissance!

The composite chart (see page 3) was aggregated from the category charts shown below. The category data were gleaned from near-identical items on price-realized lists of:

Bittner Auctions, 1979 to 1981
Crane Auctions, 1982 to April, 1987
Bates & Brown Auction, April, 1987
CRAFTS of N.J. Auction, 1979 to April, 1987

A total of 34 catalogs were utilized. Only those items that could be

[Continued on page 3]

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ALEX AND BARBARA FARNHAM TO HOST SEPTEMBER 20 PICNIC MEETING

CRAFTS of New Jersey will open its 1987-88 year on Sunday, September 20, with the traditional picnic meeting, which will again be held at the farm and studios of Alexander and Barbara Farnham in Stockton.

The meeting will begin at 10:00 a.m. with tailgate sales in the parking field. Lunch will be served at 12:30. The lunch will be catered, but each family is asked to bring a dessert.

The picnic will be held rain or shine. If the weather is bad, we will simply move under the tent. For those who did not have their reservations in by September 12, the cost will be $8.00.

Among the contests will be the most unusual tool, the ugliest tool, and the most beautiful tool. So bring your entries. Members are also asked to bring tools or crafts for display.

And if you want to sit down during the day, bring your own chair.

To get to the Farnham farm, take I-78 to the Clinton-Pittstown exit; then

[Continued on page 2]

CRAFTS of New Jersey

Collectors of Rare and Familiar Tools Society of New Jersey

President ——— STEPHEN ZLUKY, Whitehouse

Vice President ——— HARRY J. O'NEILL, Annandale

Secretary ——— BARBARA FARNHAM, Stockton

Treasurer ——— JOHN M. WHELAN, Murray Hill

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 seven dollars for the membership year of July 1 to June 30. Membership fees may be sent to the Treasurer: John M. Whelan, 38 Colony Court, Murray Hill, NJ 07974.

The Tool Shed

Published five times per year for members of CRAFTS of New Jersey. Editor: Robert Fridlington, 8 Keith Jeffries Ave., Cranford, NJ 07016. Contributions, especially about New Jersey tools and trades, are welcomed.

[Picnic, continued from page 1]
take Rte. 513 to Frenchtown; from Frenchtown take Rte. 29 (South) along the Delaware River for six miles to Timber Falls Road and turn left (look for the CRAFTS sign). Go up the hill and into the second driveway on the left.

If you should come north on Rte. 29, Timber Falls Road is six miles north of Stockton.

In either case, look for the CRAFTS sign where Timber Falls Road comes into Rte. 29.

As to future meetings during this Tenth Anniversary year for CRAFTS, the dates and programs are as follows:

November 15—Measuring Devices by Jim Hill.

February 7—Roots of the Stanley Square by Charles and Walter Jacob.

April 10—Chairmaking by John Alexander, Jr.

June 5—The History of Bookbinding by Harold Rae.

Over the past ten years CRAFTS has grown into a large and active organization. Its greatest strength has been the quality of its programs. For all of those great programs, past and future, we once again thank Fred Shippey.

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HARRY LUDWIG MOVES HIS "SCATTERED TREASURES"

After doing business in the same location for a number of years, Harry Ludwig has packed up up his tools and primitives and moved Ludwig's Scattered Treasures to Weaver's Antique Mall on Pennsylvania Route 222, 3½ miles north of Pa. Turnpike exit 21 (one mile north of Adamstown, 7 miles south of Reading).

The Mall is open Thursday through Monday, 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except for special days. Ask for area B-6.

The Ludwigs, Harry and Marian (who brought her linens and vintage clothing to Weaver's), will be on hand or on call to help you.

The other Ludwig's Scattered Treasures, operated by Pat and Danny Ludwig, is in Glenside, PA (suburban Philadelphia), on the corner of Glenside and Keswich Avenue.

Harry has a great shop. We wish him every success in the new location.

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WHITNEY HOUSE ANTIQUE TOOL LIST

Linda Mariconda of Whitney House Antiques has brought out "Antique Tool List #1," six pages of 145 priced antique tools for the collector and user. The list includes planes, edged tools, braces, levels, Stanley items, primitives, and country accessories.

It is available at $3.00 per subscription, which includes List #1 and two yearly supplements.

Write to Whitney House Antiques, P.O. Box 136, Pompton Lakes, NJ 07442.

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?? QUERY ??

Harry L. Stevens, P.O. Box 506, Spring Branch, TX 78070, is seeking information on the W.H. Compton Shear Co., which was located in Newark in 1929.

He especially wants to know if the company went out of business and, if so, when? Or, if the company was bought out by another business, by whom?

Can any of our members provide any information on W.H. Compton Company?

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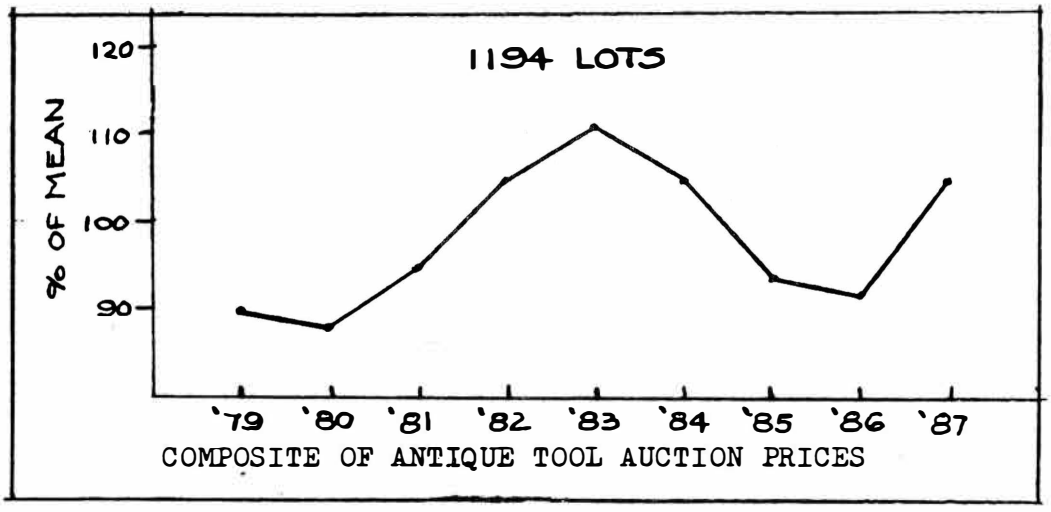
[Auction Prices, continued from page 1]



average of all similar items over the entire nine years. National auctions and club auctions were weighted as equal, in relation to occurrences.

Individual categories were selected that fit the existing data, and as such certain tools had to be omitted, even though they would be of high interest. The most significant of these omissions were:

1) Rules and Measuring Instruments. These were difficult to track statistically due to the lack of repetitiveness of the specific numbered rule or instrument. Next time, I think there will be enough to get a track. However, a general observation recognized a definite increase in this category, even during the drought of '85 and '86.

2) Iron Patent Planes. The same explanation and analysis as given for rules holds for this category also. I'm sure this is no surprise to anyone.

3) English Tools. These were too sparse in some years and didn't have enough continuity. They felt the drought much worse than their American counterparts. Although it is easy to blame this on the dollar-to-pound relationship, this implied correlation no longer exists, and they are still considerably off. (An indicstor that needs to be looked at.)

The remaining categories showed up pretty much as expected, based upon what we knew to be happening over the past few years.

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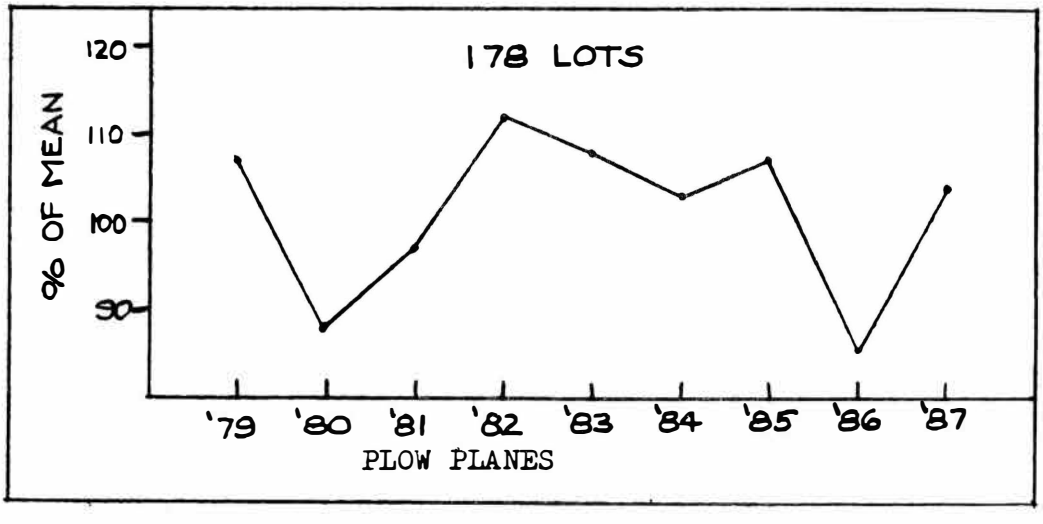
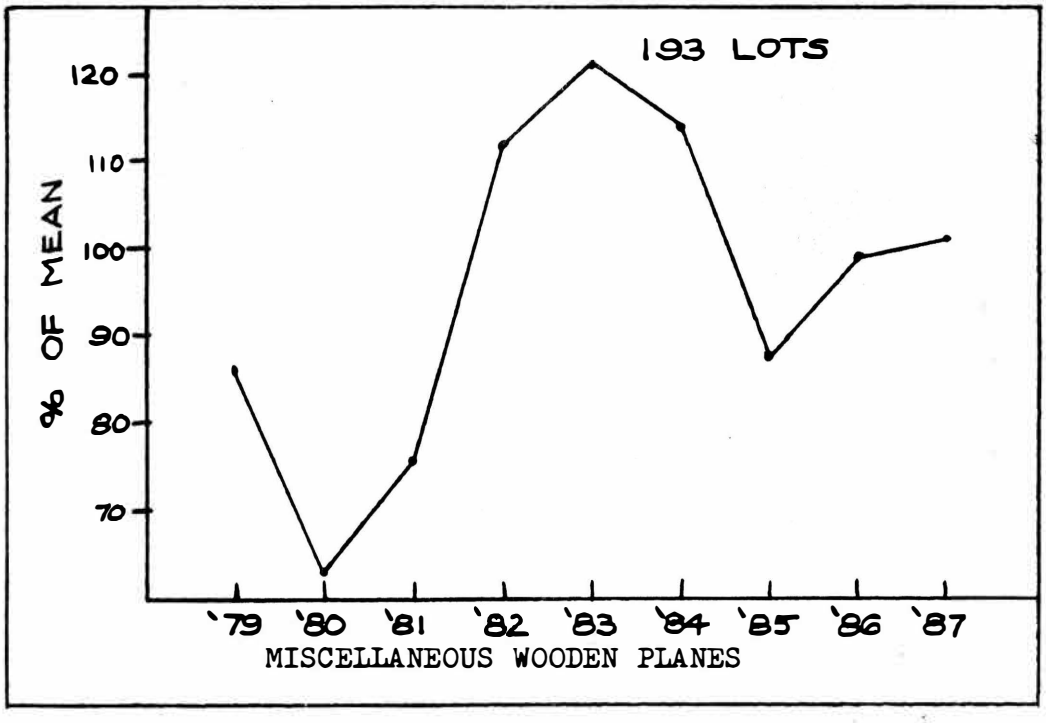
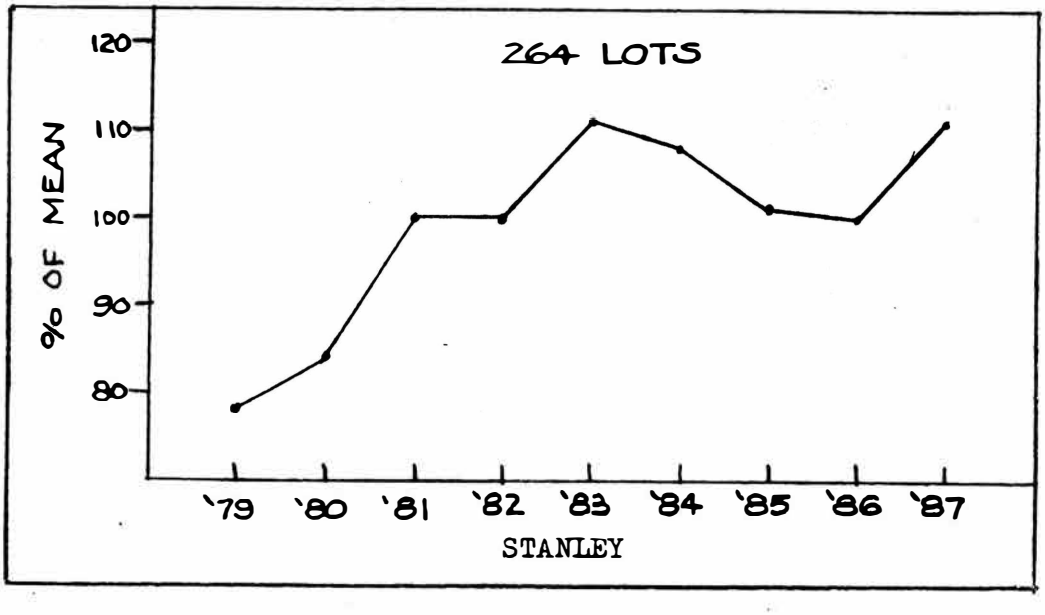


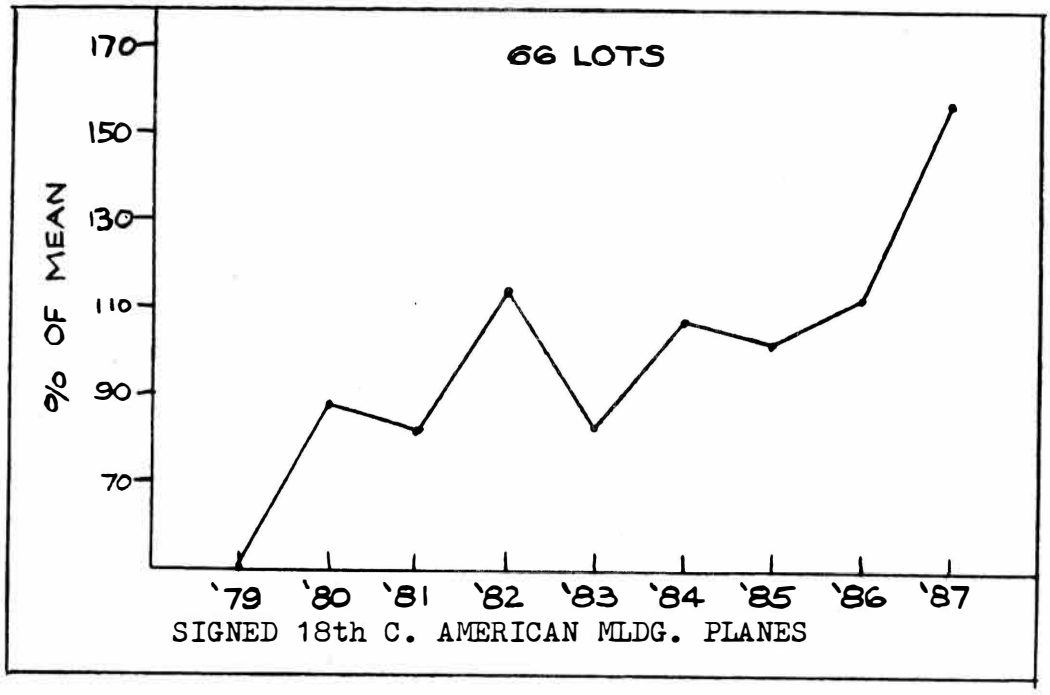
1) Plow Planes (178 Lots): Individual line items of Rosewood, Boxwood, and Beech, differentiating toted and untoted. This is the most difficult chart to accept emotionally. The slightly downward trend for one of the premier categories is a bitter pill. Let's hope the 1987 trend will continue.



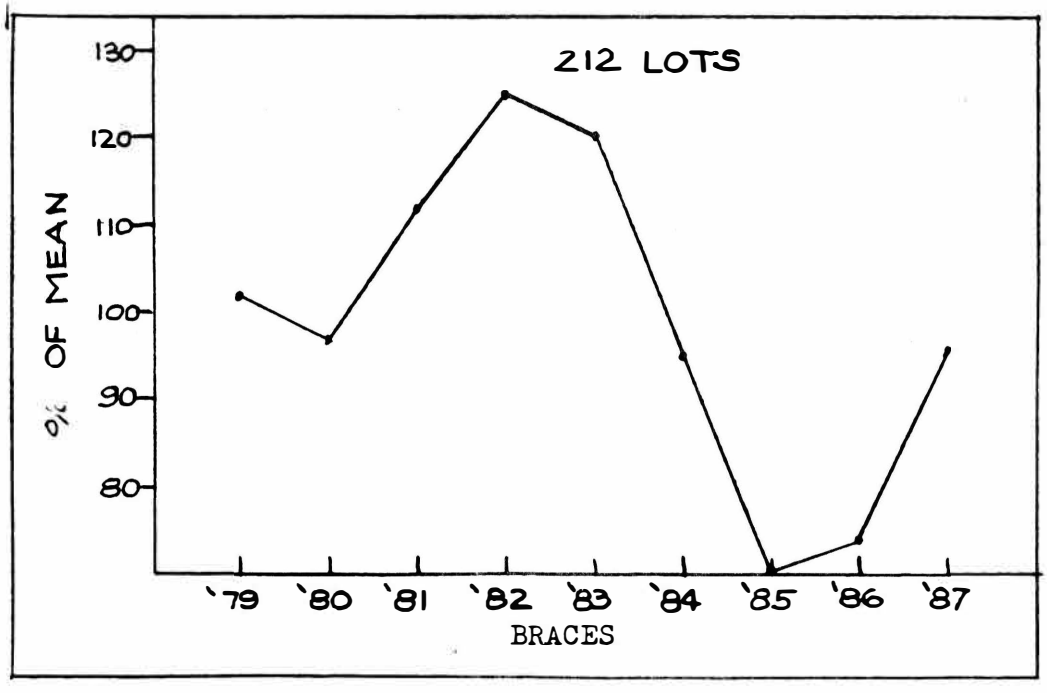
2) Miscellaneous Wooden Planes (193 Lots): Individual line items of unsigned Crown and Cornice, Exotic-Wood Smoothers, Coach, Toothing, Moving Fillester, and Complex Moulders. Shows a nice uptrend and a reasonable recovery after 1985.



3) Stanley Planes (264 Lots): 32 individual line items, including model numbers of both rare and common. Even Stanley planes got hit with the drought of '85-'86. But '87 showed they're back on track.



4) Signed American 18th C. Moulding Planes (66 Lots): Individual line items of F. Nicholson, I. Nicholson, C.E. Chelor, I. Sleeper, I. Lindenberger, Tho. Grant, A. Smith, and Jo Fuller. All planes were of simple configurations. The meteoric rise in this category required that the vertical scale on the chart be cut in half. It is interesting to note that similar unsigned 18th century moulding planes showed very little increase over the years. No analysis of Tools vs. Other Collectibles can be complete without taking in this highly significant indicator.



5) Braces (212 Lots): Individual line items of Unplated Sheffields, Plated Sheffields, Ultimatums, Gents, Cage-Head, and Primitives. This category has shown the most discouraging drop since 1983. But look at 1987!

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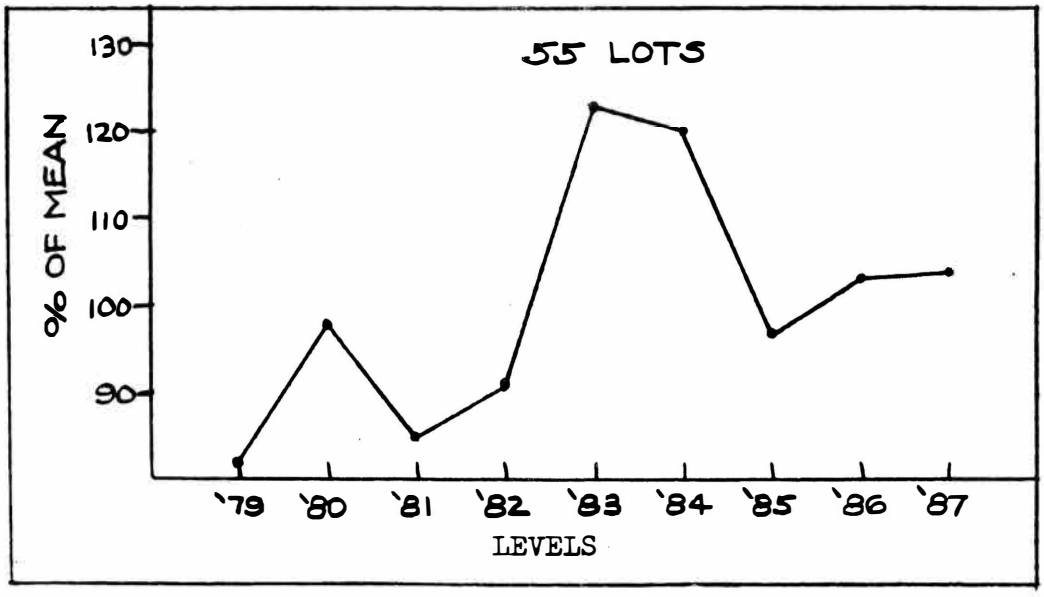
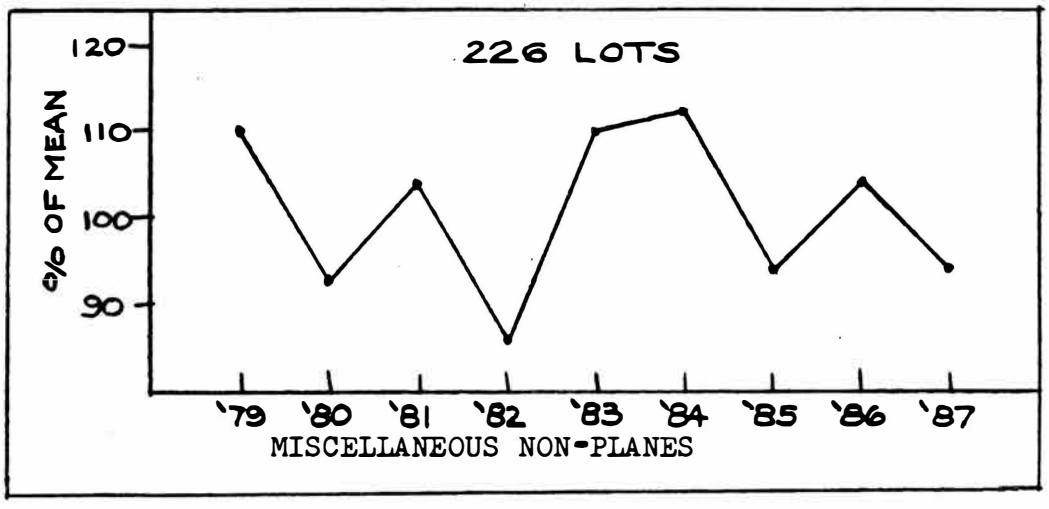


6) Levels (55 Lots); Individual line items of Stratton, Stanley, and Davis, broken into mahogany vs. rosewood and varying lengths. Shows a decent slope over the nine years, but a mediocre recovery since 1985.



Miscellaneous Non-Planes (226 Lots): Individual line items of 3" Slicks, Travelers, Broad Axes, Goosewings, Turning Saws, Mitre Jacks, Coach Routers, Gooseneck Chisels, Coopers' Crozes, and Coopers' Howells. Although the overall category trend is flat, it is interesting to note that the national auction trend is down, while the club auction trend is up. However, in neither case was there a recovery in 1987. Another important indicator.

I'm not sure why the drought, why the renaissance, or why the lag. I've got some ideas—some mine, some not.

I'm going to keep tracking prices until I can put everything together with some constructive analysis.

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THE POLLAKS' EXPANDED "GUIDE": A REVIEW

by Alexander Farnham

Emil and Martyl Pollak, A GUIDE TO AMERICAN WOODEN PLANES AND THEIR MAKERS. Second Edition. Morristown, N.J.: The Astragal Press, 1987. Pp. 435+. Soft-bound, Sewn, Illus., and Bibliography. Price: $25.00.

When the first edition of American Wooden Planes came out in 1983, collectors and dealers found it of tremendous help in identifying and evaluating. For the first time, through short biographies of planemakers contained in this one volume, it was possible to establish locations and approximate dates of manufacture. Within a few years of publication, the first guide was sold out.

In the meantime, however, Emil and Martyl had not been idly resting on their laurels. Instead, they had continued to gather both information and rubbings of makers' marks not included in their first book, with the idea of publishing a revised, expanded edition. There is actually over 50% more information contained in their second edition.

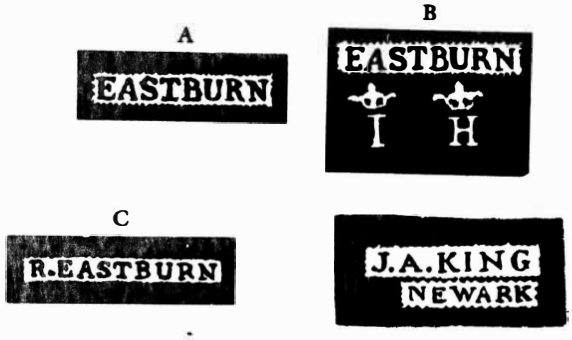
The planemakers covered span those working prior to the American Revolution to the last few making wooden planes commercially at the beginning of the 20th century. Included are more than 1660 biographical entries, over 1330 marks from the toe ends of planes, and 600 wedge silhouettes. Commenting on the latter, the authors state:

"For the plane user the wedge serves to hold the iron and permit its adjustment for depth of cut. For the collector, the wedge serves as an aid in identifying a plane and determining its age. By the second quarter of the 19th century, wedge shapes had become largely standardized as machines were increasingly used to manufacture planes. Earlier, wedges were highly individualized reflecting each maker's own peculiar vision and the training he had received."

Though the planemakers' marks reproduced in the guide are printed in actual size, the wedge patterns, to save space are shown at only 55% of their size.

In the earlier edition the rarity of certain planes was only hinted at. In this edition, however, there is added a system of stars to denote relative scarcity. Four stars indicate extreme rarity, with fewer than 50 examples known. Three stars mean 50 to 100 are known, two stars between 100 and 250, and one star 250 to 500. The absence of any star indicates either insufficient information exists on which to make a judgment or that over 500 examples are thought to exist. A large majority of the planes listed appear without stars.

At the time Emil and Martyl Pollak were doing research for their earlier guide, I was working on my book Early Tools of New Jersey and the Men Who Made Them. We would often run into each other at the Alexander Library of Rutgers University. It was Emil and Martyl who tipped me off to the fact that Robert Eastburn (1774-1854) made planes in the back of his store in New Brunswick and was perhaps this state's earliest planemaker. There are three planemaker's marks and four wedge patterns shown under EASTBURN. The rarest of his marks, rating three stars, is accompanied by crowned initials. The same early imprint without crowned initials rates only one star and is less rare than a much later mark which rates two stars.



At the time I was working on my book, there was only one known plane marked J.A. KING / NEWARK. Made by black planemaker John A. King around 1835, this plane was part of my personal collection of New Jersey tools and would certainly have rated four stars. Shortly after publication of my book, however, planes made by John A. King started coming out of the woodwork. In their present guide the Pollaks rate the rarity of King's planes with only three

[Continued on following page]

stars. On the other hand, planes marked W.H.H. WHITE / N. BRUNSWICK / N.J., of which I own three, rate four stars since not many have surfaced.

Besides identifying planemakers, their marks, and wedges, this new edition of American Wooden Planes provides an illustrated introduction to the types and styles of planes. Also included is a short history of planemaking in America and an explanation of what makes some planes more valuable than others. A glossary of terms is given, as is a list of clubs and organizations open to anyone interested in tools.

There no doubt is much information still to be uncovered about American planes. The authors state both near the beginning and towards the end that they would welcome such information since they plan to periodically revise their guide. What could be more exciting than to discover an American wooden plane whose maker is not listed by Emil and Martyl Pollak.

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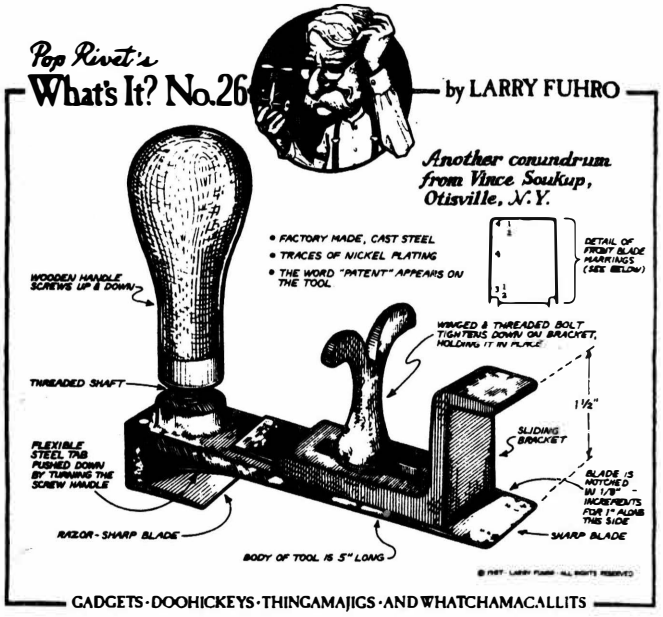
WHAT'S IT? NO. 26 IDENTIFIED



Pop Rivet's "What's It?" No. 26 may have fooled most of our readers, but a small band of tool sleuths quickly identified it.

—It is a clapboard gage. The left side is the bottom. The razor blade edge will slip under the last course nailed, and the steel tab locks it. The sliding bracket is the adjustment for the next course. The marking determined the coursing—i.e., the amount exposed to the weather.

J. Lee Murray, Jr.
Warner, N.H.

—It is a clapboard gauge, Johnson's Patent. It is shown on page 60 of the Chronicle, XVIII, No. 4, Dec. 1965 (p. 352 of the 50th Anniversary Reprint). This illustration is from the Peck, Stow & Wilcox Co. catalog, 1890, p. 195.

Jack Whelan
Murray Hill, NJ

—[It is a clapboard gauge], which closely resembles a variety of other types that I've seen. Compare it, for example, to the Stanley No. 89 Clapboard Gauge which also has blades on the bottom end to slide under a board already in place, a means of clamping the tool to that board, and an adjustable (and scaled) upper bracket for locating the board being placed....

Bob Nelson
Cheverly, MD

—I always enjoy Pop Rivet's What's It? His Number 26 is a puzzle that is too complex for me, but I can applaud (clap) his art work, as it will never make you board. His doohickeys and thingamajigs are a gauge above all others.

I.M. Anon

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WANTED: A SILVERSMITH'S ANVIL

Ms. Vivian Gold, 35 Highland Ave., Walden, N.Y. 12586, is interested in locating a silversmith's anvil or even a blacksmith's anvil if the forging surface is in good condition.

If you have one for sale, write her at the above address.

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POP RIVET IS ON VACATION

HE WILL RETURN IN NOVEMBER