

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Newsletter



June 2020

THE PRIVY

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So what, you may well ask, is a museum newsletter doing writing about outhouses. Well the **Francestown Heritage Museum** has you covered on this topic with several exhibits having various types and designs of seats with from one to multiple “holers”. Yes, you are correct, holer refers to the number of seating accommodations in the structure. No stalls in those days, everyone was up close and personal inside (probably the only way to stay warm in February).

Functionality often trumped appearance. . . .



Strictly speaking, an outhouse is a small structure, separate from the main building, which covers a toilet facility. No doubt you all already knew that. However the primary sorts of “facility” housed included:

PIT LATRINES – which collects waste in a hole in the

ground. Once full it is emptied or covered over and the outhouse moved. I have spoken with a local resident who recalls that as he was the youngest boy in the family, it was his job to empty the family facility – we’ll skip the details. Just be thankful for your flush toilet.

BUCKET TOILET – which consisted of a seat on a portable pail or bucket. Once full the receptacle was dumped on the compost pile or in cities, collected by “nightmen”.

Regardless of the sort of disposal in the facility they did all share some common features:

- It was recommended they be a reasonable distance from the house, balancing easy access versus odor.
- All were built to provide a visual screen, protection from the elements, privacy and comfort to the user.
- They were simple structures so they could be easily moved when the pit became full.

Why a crescent moon in the door? An unsubstantiated legend dates to colonial times when the sun and the moon were symbols for the sexes. The crescent moon indicated that one outhouse was for the males and the other for the females. Regardless, it provided much needed ventilation.

However, the various issues surrounding privies pale in comparison to today’s COVID-19 toilet paper shortages. As you lament this modern day problem think back to your ancestors and their privy. Toilet paper had not yet been available, nor had the Sears Catalog yet come along. As you reach for your dwindling roll of toilet paper imagine your relatives reaching for the container in the outhouses – the one with the corn cobs in it. Perspective my friends, perspective. **CONTINUED**

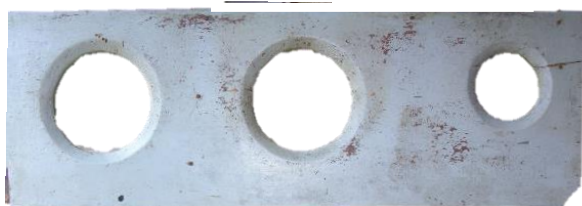
While not all outhouses were structures of beauty, George Washington apparently did things in style. Below is a replica of the outhouse he had built at Mount Vernon.



There do appear to have been some differences between George's life style and that of our rural ancestors. The three hole facility in George's outhouse



Vs. the three hole accommodation that we have from a local farm. This is available for viewing in the **Francestown Heritage Museum**.



Placing a young child on a standard outhouse seating area would have been fraught with peril – woe to the poor child who fell through the too large hole into the pit below. Below is an early version of today's child seat for a toilet – if the hole is too large this seat can be placed over it. This is also available for viewing in the Heritage Museum's somewhat eclectic collection.



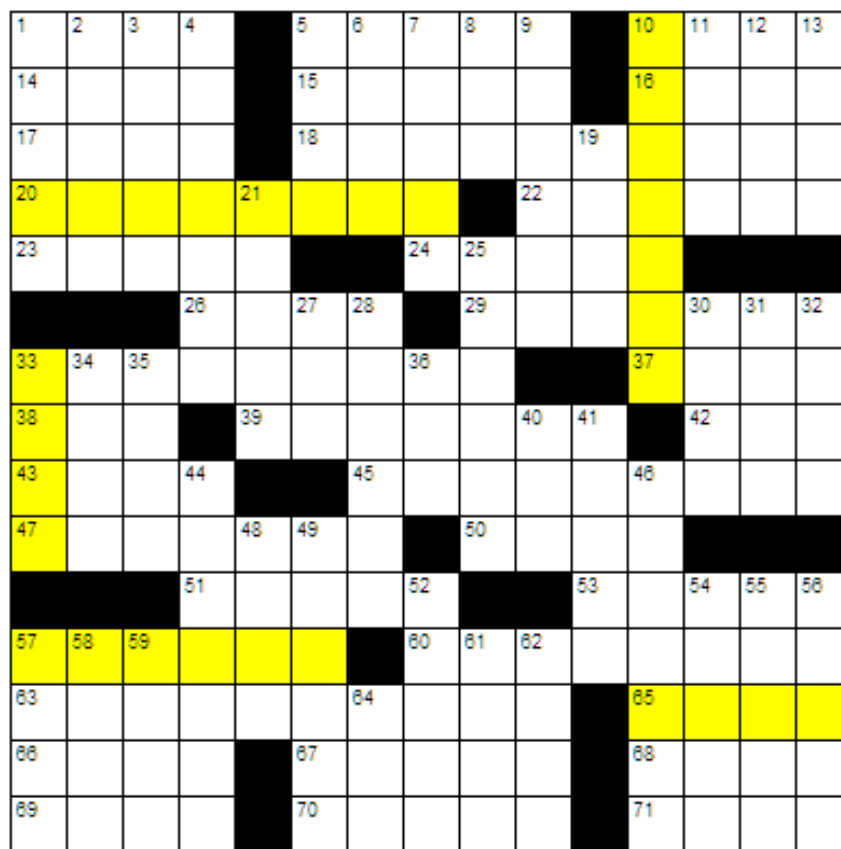
Odor control was an issue with the old outhouses and it was common to have a bucket of powdered lime with a scoop on hand. A scoop of lime is sprinkled into the lid hole to cover the waste. In addition the outhouse seating area often had a lid that could be lowered over the hole(s). This is an example of such a seating facility from a local outhouse and can be seen at the Museum.



Note the lids that help to contain odor and the different size holes for members of the family.

Not all outhouses were a single story and some had two levels serving separate floors of an attached building. In 1809 The Boston Exchange Coffee House had a four story outhouse with windows on each floor until it burned in 1818.

This month's theme crossword is a standard American format and deals with the Privy. Enjoy!



Across

- 1. A Broadway play
- 5. Home for feral cats
- 10. Lavatories
- 14. Mixed blend
- 15. ME town on NH border
- 16. Angle between branch and trunk
- 17. Aid
- 18. Person learning a trade
- 20. A privy
- 22. Analyzed a sentence
- 23. Set of moral principles
- 24. Ruth's mother-in-law
- 26. Lily plant
- 29. Wholeness
- 33. Olden great artist
- 37. Dutch cheese

Down

- 38. Female deer
- 39. More dapper
- 42. African antelope
- 43. A moonfish
- 45. A dyed egg
- 47. That which makes something smaller
- 50. Dialect form of you
- 51. Capital of Tibet
- 53. Former name of Bangladesh's capital
- 57. CONTAINER FOR WASTE
- 60. A pedaler
- 63. Lacking realism
- 65. PRIVY NECESSITY
- 66. Examine
- 67. Found in some NH basements and water
- 68. Unwrinkled
- 69. Melody
- 70. Distinctive smell
- 71. IOU

Down

- 1. A bagel go-with
- 2. Natives of Alaska
- 3. Tillage
- 4. Fallacious argument
- 5. Boyfriend
- 6. Mount Blanc et al
- 7. Mature
- 8. Used with neither
- 9. Tread upon
- 10. MILITARY LOO
- 11. What earth rotates on
- 12. Immoral behavior
- 13. Vehicle on runners
- 19. Moniker
- 21. Most of earth's surface
- 25. Past tense of a verb
- 27. Cookie seller
- 28. Playful mammal
- 30. Border
- 31. They _____ the song

Down

- 32. Self-satisfied
- 33. PRIVY ISSUE
- 34. Bounding stride
- 35. Expired
- 36. Greek "e"
- 40. ___ _ _ ics
- 41. Slender
- 44. Immense person
- 46. Arrived at
- 48. Chief cook
- 49. Consumers of food
- 52. Obey
- 54. _____ hitch knot
- 55. Big name
- 56. Looks _____ everything
- 57. Air kiss
- 58. Remarkable
- 59. Scottish family
- 61. Visual representation
- 62. Monetary unit
- 64. Resinous substance

WHERE IS THIS PLACE? – from the May issue



Not much of a challenge here for local residents. Even others may well have seen this barn in Yankee Magazine and/or other publications. It is the barn at the Pettee farm on New Boston Road. The real question centered on the weather vane.



~40 years ago there were a rash of thefts of old weathervanes from barn roofs. They had become a really hot item in antique circles and some of the thieves became so enterprising that they were using helicopters to swoop down and take the vanes. So as not to lose this valuable old antique, the owner had it removed and replaced with a replica (which is what you see today).

So what happened to the original weather vane? Well we were hoping you could tell us. The current owner was told that her father had it taken down and a local resident took it to deliver it to a museum – it was thought the Museum of Natural History - NYC. Only recently was it learned that the museum never received it. The local resident who received the vane for transport to the museum has not said where it is. Strangely enough the current owner of the property said that she had been out working in her garden

when a couple who had been driving by, stopped and introduced themselves saying they were from Portsmouth, NH and noticed the weathervane on the barn. They were quite surprised as the property they had bought in Portsmouth had an identical weathervane and they had believed that it was a one of kind item.

You will notice that the vane features an Indian on horseback with a lance in his hand. It is believed this vane was originally made as such to commemorate some event in history involving the Indians and the colonists. Like the actual location of the original vane this story remains a mystery that has been lost in time.

So our challenge remains. If anyone can fill in the blanks here, one the Museum’s coveted Life Time free membership passes is still on offer.

- The solution to this month’s crossword –

S	O	N	G	S	C	E	N	T	D	E	B	T	
S	C	A	N	R	A	D	O	N	E	V	E	N	
U	N	L	I	F	E	L	I	K	E	H	O	L	E
B	U	C	K	E	T	B	I	C	Y	C	L	E	R
L	H	A	S	A	D	A	C	C	A				
R	E	D	U	C	E	R	T	H	E				
O	P	A	H										
D	O	E	N	A	T	I	E	R					
O	L	D	M	A	S	T	E	R	E				
S	E	G	O										
E	T	H	I	C									
O	U	T	H	O	U	S	E	P	A	R	S	E	D
H	E	L	P										
O	L	I	O	E	L	I	O	T	A	X	I	L	
C	A	T	S										

This puzzle had a couple of words that are hardly widely used. However, when putting these puzzles together you sometimes have to work with what you have. Sometimes desperation (trying to come up with viable alternative words to fit) leads to desperate measures (going with something that fits even if it isn’t an everyday word). Hopefully it broadened your vocabulary. Now if you can only solve the weather vane mystery