

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Newsletter

December 2021



YULETIDE



CONSTANT FLUX

Many no doubt recall my usual end of the year opining that nothing much happens in the Museum in winter – a prime reason being it is not heated.

BUT, this winter will be different. Yes we have removed all the paper items, cloth goods and photos and placed them in a warm building for winter, but this winter a project is in the works. Actually several projects:

- 1) Building an entirely new exhibit –
- 2) Completing a monograph on the cooper's art of making casks –
- 3) Working with the library children's program to create a "Look and Find" –

SOME DETAILS

1 & 2) The wooden cask or keg was essential to life in the colonies. No cardboard boxes or steel barrels in those days. From grain to gunpowder to whiskey; all loose or liquid goods had to be placed in a wooden cask or keg for transport.

Making a wooden cask or keg was no simple undertaking. In addition to the skills of the cooper, over 25 specialized hand tools were required to make such a container.



Above are a number of these tools which will be incorporated in our coming new exhibit.

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DO YOU KNOW?

- The difference between a log and a plank road
- Why the colonists had log roads
- Why the colonists had plank roads
- That Frankestown had a log road
 - Where was it?

LOG ROADS:

A log road (a/k/a a corduroy road) is made by placing logs next to each other perpendicular to the direction of the road

So why build a log road?

Glad you asked: In wet areas this created a surface above the mud. While this lessened the chance of the wagons narrow wheels getting mired in the mud it created a very bumpy surface and made riding in the wagon very uncomfortable. It was also treacherous footing for the horse – the logs were uneven, slippery and sometimes loose.



Now if this was you and your wagon, would you not be the first to stand at the next Town Meeting and demand something be done about the road?

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DECEMBER THEME WORD PUZZLE

A little something different to end the year on. This is a Word Jumble Puzzle. In the grid are 11 theme words from this newsletter. Your task is to find the 11 words and circle them. The words can appear horizontally, vertically or diagonally. A single letter in the grid can appear in more than one word. As an example, the word BRIDGE has been circled. Bridge is one of the 11 theme words (you no doubt recall we referred to the iconic New England covered bridge in the newsletter text) so you must find and circle the other 10 theme words. ENJOY



The words you are looking for would be:

BRIDGE, CASK, COOPER, LIBRARY, MARRIED, PLANK, PUNCHEON, SCAVENGER, SLACKS, STOUTS, YOUTHS

CONSTANT FLUX- CONTINUED FROM- PAGE #1

A number of the tools needed were already in the museum collection and the remainder were collected by a donor for the exhibit.

There were three types of container made by a cooper:

- Dry casks k/a *slacks* were made of lighter wood and used for storing and shipping provisions such as flour, oysters, seeds, powders, et al.
- Wet casks k/a *stouts* were made for storing and shipping whiskey, syrups, vinegar, et al.
- White coopering refers to the making of straight side containers that are not enclosed at the top. This includes such items as pails and buckets, butter churns and other such containers.

3) “Look and Find” – in an effort to garner community involvement in the museum we met with the Town’s new Children’s Librarian – Kelly Bellemare, to explore ways to imbue interest and involve area youths in the museum. The idea for a scavenger hunt was put forward and all agreed.



To our good fortune, Kelly has some past experience with this sort of thing when she was the Children’s Librarian in Derry, NH. At this time we are also looking into a scavenger hunt for all ages to be held in conjunction with the Towns Sestercentennial. More details in 2022. Ω

LOG ROADS . . . CONTINUED FROM- PAGE #1

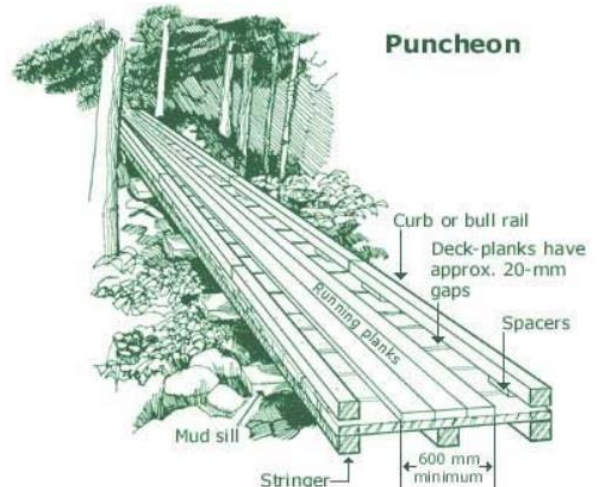
The call went out and soon trees were cut, oxen smoothed the existing muddy road as best they could and ditches were dug along the sides to help with drainage. The logs were laid.

This is hardly a modern Interstate highway but one of the colonists’ steady improvements as they settled the land. No longer were you stuck in the mud, but it was uncomfortable riding and treacherous for the horses.



(Getty Images)

Having tackled the problem of getting mired in mud, the settlers next goal was to smooth the ride and increase safety for the horses. Thus in the 1840s and 1850s the US experienced a plank road boom. As the name implies, these roads were built of wood planks a/k/a puncheon logs, the construction of which was made possible by the increasing number of water-powered sawmills. These roads were often built by Turnpike Companies such as the one that constructed the 2nd NH Turnpike through Frankestown.



The first plank road was built in Syracuse, NY in 1846 but technology spread quickly. However, warp, rot, insects, etc combined to create expensive repairs and the roads were short lived.

FROM THE MOUTHS OF BABES

➤ **HOW DO YOU DECIDE WHO TO MARRY?**

- No person really decides before they grow up who they are going to marry. God decides it all before then and you find out later who you are stuck with - - - Kristen, age 10

➤ **HOW CAN A STRANGER TELL IF TWO PEOPLE ARE MARRIED?**

- You might have to guess based on whether they seem to be yelling at the same kids - - - Derrick, age 8

➤ **WHEN IS IT OK TO KISS SOMEONE?**

- When they're rich - - - Pam, age 7

➤ **IS IT BETTER TO BE SINGLE OR MARRIED?**

- It is better for girls to be single but not for boys. Boys need someone to clean up after them - - - Anita, age 9

Ω

LOG ROADS - CONTINUED FROM - PAGE #3

While no record could be found that such a road existed in Francestown, the method of construction of them is still plainly visible today in the iconic New England covered bridges where the flooring of the bridges is plank construction similar to the puncheon diagram on page 4.



LINCOLN BRIDGE – WOODSTOCK, VT Ω



WHAT DO YOU MEAN THERE ARE ONLY 2 SHOPPING DAYS LEFT UNTIL CHRISTMAS'



**HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO ALL FROM THE
FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM STAFF**

