

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM



Newsletter

January 2021

POTASH FACTORIES

POTASH MANUFACTURING –

You may recall that in last month's newsletter we made reference to three potash factories in Francestown between 1790 and 1835. This begs two questions:

What is potash – In the case of Francestown the term potash refers to a refinement of wood ash (ash from burning trees). We had and have lots of woods. Its primary use today is in fertilizer but historically it had a number of different uses that would include everything from soap to gun powder, leavening for cooking, glass making and ceramic production. In fact, potash was the first real cash product for the settlers and could be sold or exported. A chief export customer was England where it was used to clean raw wool before processing.

In pottery it is used in ceramic glazes where it reduces the melting point of the glaze.

Potash can be further processed to make lye or wood ash soap.

Potash can be used to soak and boil food such as corn to eliminate toxins and also in leavenings.

How is it made – the making of potash was quite straight-forward. The settlers would cut/harvest hardwood trees (softwood did not make good potash) and place them in large piles where they were allowed to dry. They were later burned and the resultant wood ash was what was used to start the potash manufacturing process. The wood ash would be placed in a large barrel with a drain in the bottom that emptied into a receptacle. Water was then poured into the barrel and what seeped out of the barrel was lye (very good for making soap) which was poured into a potash kettle. This apparatus was known as "A leach".

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MUSEUM BUILDING –

Visitors to the museum are often struck by the exposed timber frame of the building. A tour of the other buildings on the historic Francestown Common will reveal similar construction on those, such as the Old Meeting House and the Town Hall as well as a number of the residences in the area.



RECONSTRUCTION OF THE MUSEUM FRAME - 2010

A frequent question centers on how they accomplished moving these large timbers back in the days before cranes and other mechanical devices. So let's see if we can respond to that question.

A simple device known as a "gin pole" was the implement of choice when having to move and lift heavy timbers.

A gin pole is a supported pole with a rope and pulley attached to its upper end to lift a load. The lower end is braced so that the upper end is above the object to be lifted. Guy wire(s) hold the gin pole in the desired position and keep it erect. The rope and pulley at the upper end does the actual lifting when workers pull on the rope. On large/heavier timbers the end of the rope could be fastened to an ox or draft animal.

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POTASH MANUFACTURING – continued



A LEACH

This lye would be boiled to evaporate the water. After the liquid is boiled off what remained was a brown cake called potash.



BOILING DOWN THE LEACH

As you know, there was and is no shortage of trees in Francestown and thus there was a ready source of wood ash. 200 bushels of wood ash would generate 100 pounds of potash. It was reported that the potash produced by an acre of woodland could be sold for more than the purchase price of the land. This provided income for cash poor farmers who had to clear the land anyway in order to plant their crops.

The life of a tree in Francestown in the early years was tenuous. Trees were cut to provide lumber for the building of homes, wood for the heating of the homes and businesses and to open up space for more fields in which to plant crops. Bark was used for the tanning of leather.

POTASH MANUFACTURING – continued

But our intrepid ancestors were not done yet with the process. They knew that a purer form of potash, known as pearlash (a concentrated form of potash) was worth far more than plain potash.

In order to obtain this purer form of potash they would take the brown cakes of potash and break them up.



CAKE AND BOKEN UP POTASH

They would then leach these in the same manner as they did the wood ash and boil that leach to evaporate the water. What remained this time was a whitish cake which was the purer potash known as pearlash.



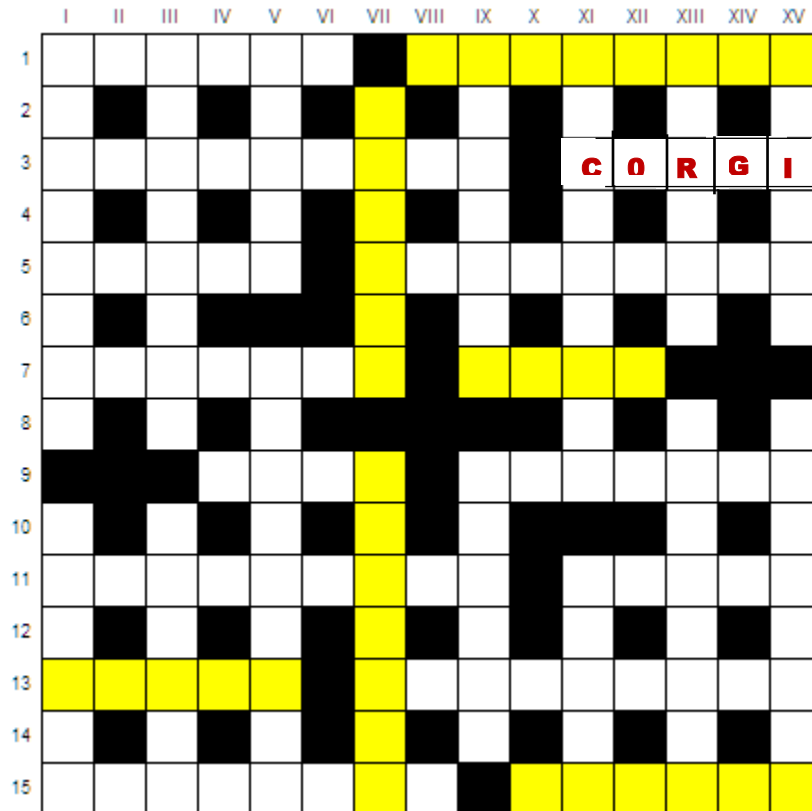
BROKEN UP PEARLASH

JANUARY THEME CROSSWORD SOLUTION

15	H	E	R	O	I	N	P	E	A	R	L	A	S	H	1	
14	A	E	A	N	A	P	A	R	O	P	O	S	A	S	2	
13	R	A	I	N	C	O	L	O	R	G	I	A	D	I	3	
12	A	D	A	N	D	O	W	N	E	R	E	A	S	4		
11	L	A	N	D	O	W	N	E	R	E	A	S	5			
10	S	E	R	V	E	S	E	R	E	A	S	6				
9	A	P	R	O	P	O	S	A	S	7						
8	A	P	R	O	P	O	S	A	S	8						
7	Y	A	S	A	G	T	A	G	A	9						
6	P	O	S	A	H	B	A	H	O	10						
5	P	O	H	B	A	H	O	11								
4	O	S	T	R	E	E	S	L	12							
3	O	S	T	R	E	E	S	L	13							
2	C	I	D	E	R	A	F	O	R	E	S	A	I	D	14	
1	M	I	L	A	D	E	L	E	S	T	I	M	B	E	R	15

JANUARY THEME CROSSWORD

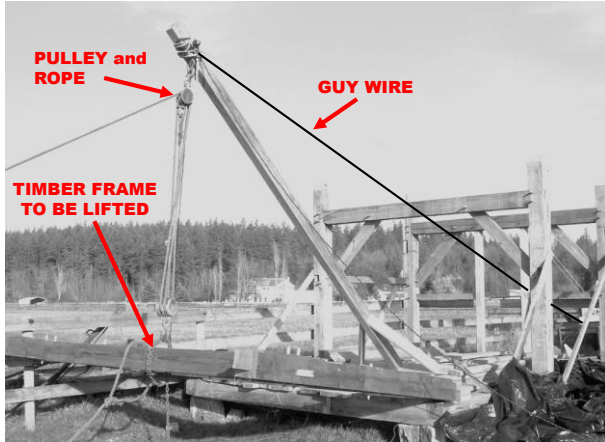
The theme words come from this month's newsletter. The blocks on the grid for the theme words are in yellow. This is a French grid crossword (we've done these before so you should be an old hand at them by now). There are no numbers in the cubes but rather along the margins. Therefore any one line or column can have multiple words in it. For example line 1 has 6 adjoining open spaces and also has another 8 adjoining open spaces. This line has two words and in looking at the clues you see there are 2 clues for 1 across. Line 2 has no open adjoining spaces so there are no words going across in line 2. Line 3 has 9 adjoining open spaces and also has another 5 adjoining open spaces so this line also has two words. The second clue is "Queen's pet" and the answer is "Corgi". The same procedure would be used for the Down words. For example, Column I has 8 adjoining spaces and also has another 6 adjoining spaces so the column has two words and in looking at the clues you see that there are 2 clues for I Down. All clues for theme words are in capital letters. The solution is on page two.



Across

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. Highly addictive drug
PURER FORM OF
POTASH</p> <p>3. Nimbus cloud
Queen's pet</p> <p>5. Autumn drink
Previously mentioned</p> <p>7. Pompously self-important
FAMILY DIAGRAM</p> <p>9. Alone
Fit</p> | <p>11. Proprietor of land
Wait on</p> <p>13. PERCOLATE
Edges of a town</p> <p>15. Genteel women
WOODEN BEAM</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Down</p> <p>I. Computer output on
paper
Race on winding course</p> <p>III. Produced by 3 across
Ultimate object</p> | <p>V. Bring upon oneself
Affianced</p> <p>VII. SETTLERS FIRST REAL
CASH PRODUCT
POLE FOR LIFTING LOADS</p> <p>IX. Ultimate
Freshen</p> <p>XI. Oranized crime person
Divine feminine power</p> <p>XIII. Old TV necessity
Barbecue favorite</p> <p>XV. Coiffure
Calculator of value</p> |
|---|---|---|

MUSEUM BUILDING – continued



That suffices for construction of the first floor. Since a gin pole is seldom more than 20' long, you may realize that this is not going to work for buildings more than one or two stories at the most. What about the upper floors?

Here again simplicity was the name of the game back in colonial times – life was hard enough. So once the first floor was complete they just disassembled the gin pole set-up and reinstalled it on the new second floor – the base anchored to the new floor and the guy wires extended and fastened to outer frame members. The line from the rope and pulley assembly was positioned just over the outside wall so they could lift items up from the ground and another 16' or so above this new second floor. They could then repeat this procedure for the new third floor, fourth floor, etc., finally moving the gin pole set up to the new attic floor so they could assemble the roof. A tower or spire could also be built using the same method – continually moving the gin pole up to each new level as it was completed.



GIN POLE WORKING FROM UPPER FLOOR

While the museum does not have a gin pole exhibit, we do have several other tools used when erecting timber frame buildings. Notable among these is a beadle – yes it is a beadle and not a beetle.



A BEADLE

This is an essential timber framing tool. The beadle is always needed at some time during the raising of a timber frame or post and beam structure. They are used to help seat joinery together, shift posts or beams and sometimes to drive wooden pegs. This tool was very common at barn raisings and other events where timber frames were assembled.

The pre-Christmas snow storm was not all that welcome to last minute holiday shoppers and commuters but it left behind some really nice scenery.



Photo courtesy of Alison Scott
Udall Road.

I almost forgot –

HAPPY NEW YEAR

May it be less stressful than 2020. Come visit the
FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM.