

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Newsletter



March 2021

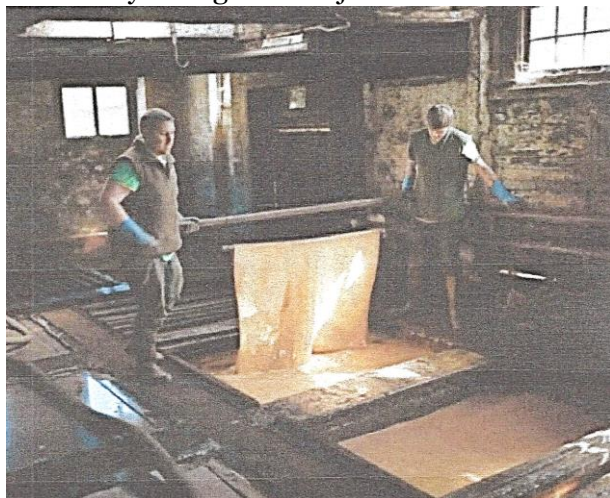
TANNERIES – PART II

FRANCESTOWN TANNERIES . . .

In our February Museum Newsletter we left you in the tannery where you had spent the last few months making preparations to tan some hides. Alas, you had still not actually tanned a hide. The preparations included stripping bark from oak trees and grinding the bark into small chips which you then laboriously made into a bark liquor. You had then set about soaking, salting and liming animal skins. Finally you had the pleasure of cleaning these skins, removing any leftover flesh, stripping any hair from the hide and thoroughly washing them.

So with all that complete you are ready to begin the actual tanning process. In case you are thinking that the worst is now over, you can disabuse yourself of that notion, because it is not.

Tanning essentially involves treating the hides in numerous different baths of various solutions – all of which you have had to prepare by hand and will now have to pass every animal's skin (known as a side) through in order to end with a tanned hide. So let's begin, or rather you begin – I'm just the narrator.

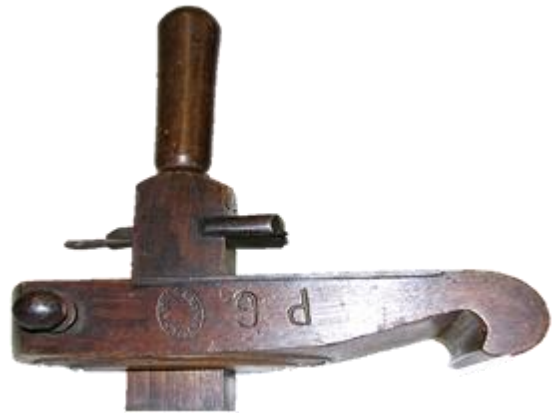


CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

A MARCH WHATZ IT . . .

This is a reader's challenge and the answer will appear in next month's newsletter. The first person to correctly identify this tool will of course receive one of the Museum's coveted Lifetime Membership passes entitling them to unlimited free visits to the museum. The value of this should not be trivialized by the fact that we do not charge admission to anyone.

This tool was used by a cooper in their trade. The protruding post is adjustable. The piece extending out of the post is a metal adjustable cutter.



The underside of the bottom sole is flat and the hook in the right end extends all the way across the sole.



CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

1) Remember that bark liquor you made some months ago? Well pour about 5 gallons of that into about 20 gallons of water to make a diluted bark liquor. You don't want to use an undiluted liquor in the first bath as it would quickly tan the outside of the hide and make it shrink before any liquor tannins reached the inside of the hide. A condition known as dead tanning or case hardening.

2) Place your hide into this dilute liquor bath and mix it every ten minutes for an hour. Then let it sit in the bath for one to six weeks.



3) Now remove the hide and pour out about five gallons of the solution and replace it with five gallons of the undiluted bark liquor. Place hides back in the barrel. Let the hides stay in this solution another week.

4) Now remove the hide and pour out about five gallons of the solution and replace it with five gallons of the undiluted bark liquor. Sound familiar – that's right, it is the same thing you did in step three. You know what to do now - place hides back in the barrel. Let the hides stay in this solution another week.

5) You remember what you did in steps three and four? Do it again. You can keep on repeating these steps until the hide becomes as dark as you want it.

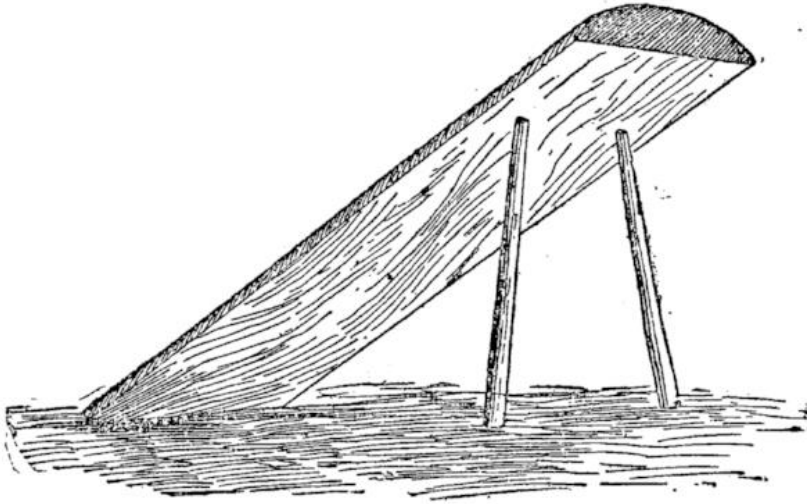
6) At the end of this time the hide should be evenly colored all the way through. If the hide still has some white or raw streaks you know what to do – repeat the process again.

7) Once the hide has reached the shade you want there is one other factor. If the hide is destined to be used for harnesses, straps, belting, etc. it can be taken out of the liquor at this stage. However, if it is to be used for soles, let it sit in the solution for another 2 months.

8) Once this is done rinse the hide in running water for two hours. This is one reason tanneries were usually sited near a river. You can then wring out the hide. We made reference to beams and fleshing knives last month and their use in fleshing and dehairing the hide. Now at this point you are no doubt expecting me to tell you about how the Museum of course has these exhibits to show you. Welllllll, we don't. If anyone has a beam and would like to donate same to the museum we would be grateful. So the following photos and background come from an article found on Skillcult (<http://skillcult.com>).

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

A beam is a section of smooth log 8" or more in diameter and about 6' long. It is supported so that it is at a ~45° angle. The purpose of the beam is to provide a working surface for cleaning (defleshing and dehairing) of the skin with the fleshing knife.



A BEAM

However, at this point in the tanning process all that is done and you want to clean/wash the hide to remove unfixed tannin left from the tanning process and this requires the use of a slicking table, a slicking iron and a slicker. The purpose here is twofold – 1) to force the liquid out of the hide using a slicker (a wet scraping tool) and 2) to smooth the hide.

The slicking table is a large flat surface that is very smooth and over 4' wide. The skin is laid on this surface and stretched out.

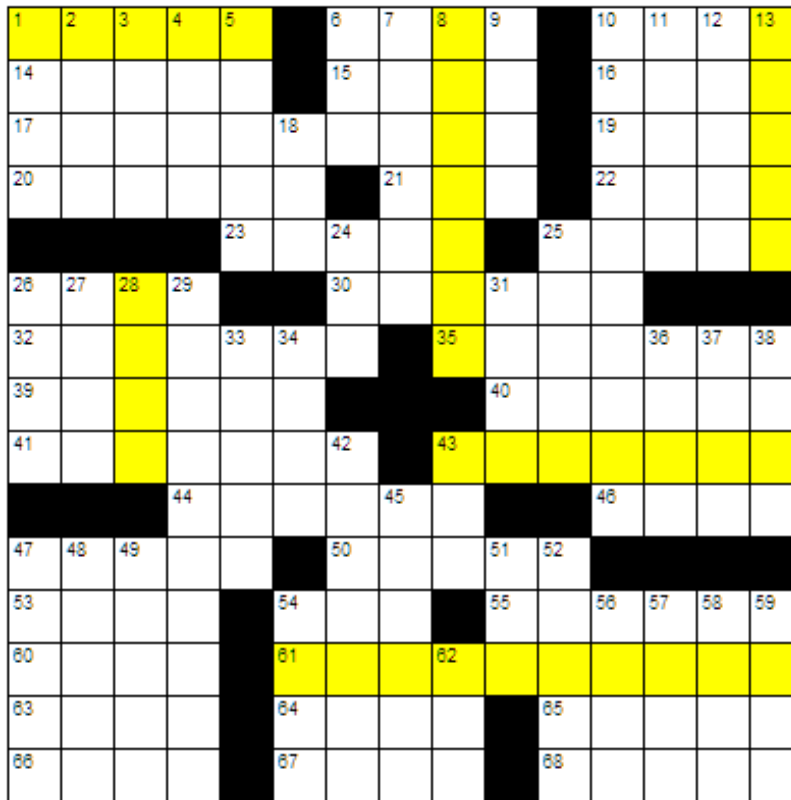


SKIN STRETCHED ON SLICKING TABLE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

MARCH THEME CROSSWORD

Yellow blocks contain the theme words, which come from the text of the newsletter. The solution appears on page 7 of this newsletter.



Across

1. A COOPERS TOOL
6. Computer info
10. Punishment for a sailor, maybe
14. Sound made by a cow
15. Milky gemstone
16. The "A" of ABM
17. Disavowing
19. Fastener
20. Complicated situations
21. nurses professional organization
22. Coastal raptor
23. Emmy-winning Lewis
25. Iron
26. Home to some Mongolian nomad
30. Happen together at same time
32. To-do list
35. Tropical tree with ediblefruit
39. Clearings
40. Boot part
41. Formative

43. TOOL TO SMOOTH A HIDE

44. Stow again
46. Appear to be
47. Tropical pepper shrub
50. A potato product
53. Auditory
54. Absorbed, as a loss
55. Lacking skill
60. Bowed
61. USED TO TAN LEATHER
63. Face-to-face exam
64. Decorative case
65. Reins in
66. Easter flower
67. Balance sheet item
68. Region wityh sinkholes

Down

1. Chowder morsel
2. After-bath wear
3. Admits, with "up"

4. Zorro's marks
5. Barely beats
6. "i" lid
7. Queen's home
8. MAKING LEATHER
9. Aquatic plant
10. CD's and DVD's
11. Cavern, in poetry
12. Numbs
13. SMOOTHED BY 43A
18. ___ Wednesday
24. Balaam's mount
25. Finnish money before EURO
26. Comedian's stock
27. Eye
28. WORKING SURFACE FOI CLEANING HIDES
29. Incidentally
31. Cover with plaster
33. Star in Cygnus
34. "By yesterday!"
36. Creep (along)
37. On the safe side, at sea
38. Make waves
42. Secrete milk
43. Schuss, e.g.
45. Innocent
47. A computer language
48. Wombs
49. Twofold
51. Afghanistan money
52. Small notch
54. Lying, maybe
56. Band with the hit "Barbie Girl"
57. Vice president under Jefferson
58. Arcing shots
59. At one time, at one time
62. Do-it-yourselfer's purchase

A slicking iron is then used to even out wrinkles and smooth/stretch the skin out towards the edges. ***The slicking iron is used on the flesh side of the hide.***



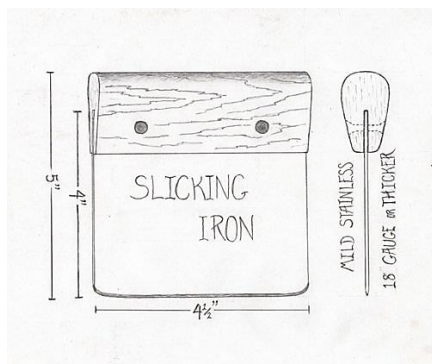
SKIN BEING SMOOTHED WITH A SLICKING IRON ON A SLICKING TABLE

The slicker is also used to smooth and even out wrinkles but ***the slicker is used on the grain side of the hide.*** The slicker removes unfixed tannin left from the tanning process.



SKIN BEING SMOOTHED WITH A SLICKER

The slicking iron and slicker are similar tools except the slicking iron is made of metal whereas the slicker is usually made of stone or glass but can be wood, metal, slate, etc.



SLICKING IRON



SLATE SLICKER

9) You will proudly note that after all your work, at this point, the hide is now referred to as leather. But before you congratulate yourself, you are not done yet. You still need to oil and finish the leather. Immediately after going over the leather with a slicker and while it is still damp go over the grain of the leather with neat's foot or cod liver oil. Hang up the leather and let it dry out slowly.

10) While the leather is drying out make up a batch of "dubbin". This is made by melting together equal parts of cod liver or neat's foot oil with tallow. Once cool it should be soft and pasty but not liquid.

11) Now take the dry leather and rewet it. Apply a thick coating of warm dubbin to the grain side of the leather. Once again hang up the leather to dry. Once it is dry scrap off the excess dubbin with a slicker. Now it is time to treat the flesh side in the same way. By now I'll bet you are thinking "thank heavens it is done". Not so fast –

12) Now take your leather and rub it all over with sawdust which will remove any surface oiliness. Now you have completed the tanning process.

Hopefully you aren't saying to yourself "never again". Remember when you first started this tanning process about 11 or 12 months ago? It was spring and you headed for the woods on a nice spring morn to start peeling bark from oak trees. Well look at the calendar – that was 12 months ago. It is springtime again. Time to head back to the woods to start peeling bark for the coming year's tanning.

So this and the previous issue of the Museum Newsletter have taught you the fine art of tanning, so now it is time for you go out and find a job. NO – not that kind of tanning.



Here is a snapshot of the tanneries in town with a Francestown map attached.

- Ewell Tannery – This was built by Perez Ewell and taken over by Amasa Downes Sr. in 1811. The tannery operated until 1850. Unlike many of the mills/businesses in town that relied on water power, energy for this mill was supplied by horsepower for grinding the bark. The operator would have to break up the bark with an ax and toss it into the hopper where it was ground, as well as keep the horse going. **This is TANNERY A&B on the page 8 map.**



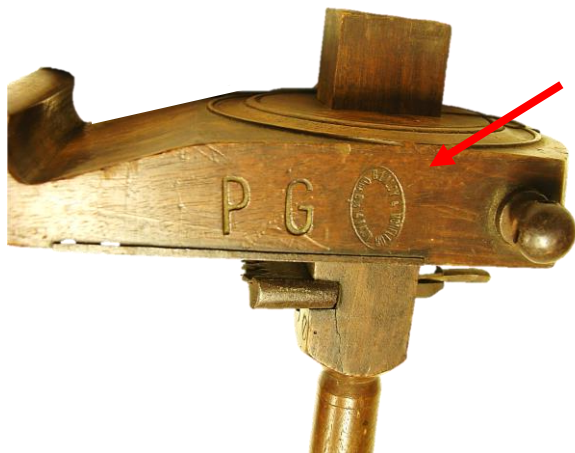
ILLUSTRATION OF HORSE BEING USE TO GRIND BARK

- The Gibson Tannery – The date this business was started/built is not known but it operated until 1827. It was located across the road (the 2nd NH Turnpike No.) from the Gibson Tavern/toll booth at the site of the present day golf course pond. **This is TANNERY C on the page 8 map.**
- True's Tannery (1805) – This tannery was built by Thomas Bixby. It eventually passed into the hands of Dea. John True who ran it until 1830. The tannery was located past the end of Oak Hill Road and south of Campbell Hill Road. **This is TANNERY D on the attached map.**
- Farnum Tannery – The beginning date of this tannery is unknown but it is listed in the 1817 Gazetteer and did not cease operation until 1860. Built by Peter Farnum, it was later taken over by Mr. Downes. This and the True, Gibson and Ewell Tanneries were called “large tanneries” by the Gazetteer.

WHATZ IT

FROM PAGE 1

The makers mark is clearly burned into the sole of the tool: GLALOY & MONFLEUR



What was this tool called and what was it used for? For those who do the monthly crossword the answer to the first clue in the puzzle is the name of the tool and is one of the theme words. You still need what it is for. E-mail answers to wfm03043@comcast.net.

And the trope for March is

At local taverns, pubs and bars, people drank from pint and quart-sized containers. A bar maid's job was to keep an eye on the customers and keep the drinks coming. She had to pay close attention and remember who was drinking pints and who was drinking quarts. Hence the phrase “minding your ‘P’s and ‘Q’s.”

ANSWER TO LAST MONTHS CROSSWORD

1	S	2	L	3	E	4	D	5	A	6	P	7	A	8	C	9	E	10	A	11	B	12	I	13	T
14	T	A	X	I	15	D	A	C	H	A	16	N	A	S	A										
17	O	R	C	S	18	O	T	H	E	R	19	W	O	R	L	D									
20	A	V	O	I	D	21	D	22	T	E	A	23	H	A	K	E	S								
24	T	A	N	N	E	25	R	Y	26	P	27	S	I												
						28	V	E	E	P	29	S	30	C	L	A	31	S	32	S	33	S	34	Y	
35	D	O	B	E	R	36	M	A	N	37	R	E	T	A	K	E									
38	E	L	L	S	39	O	N	I	C	E	40	T	R	I	G										
43	F	L	U	T	E	44	R	45	F	L	E	46	S	H	I	N	G								
47	T	A	R	S	48	U	S	49	F	I	C	H	E												
						49	R	E	V	50	P	51	H	I	L	52	T	E	53	R	54				
55	A	L	T	H	O	56	E	S	P	57	P	E	E	V	E										
62	P	A	R	I	S	63	G	R	E	E	N	64	A	N	A	L									
66	S	P	U	D	67	A	N	T	R	E	68	S	O	D	A										
69	E	P	E	E	70	D	E	I	S	T	71	T	R	E	Y										

ANSWER TO THIS MONTHS CROSSWORD

C	R	O	Z	E		D	A	T	A		L	A	S	H										
L	O	W	E	D		O	P	A	L		A	N	T	I										
A	B	N	E	G	A	T	I	N	G		S	T	U	D										
M	E	S	S	E	S		A	N	A		E	R	N	E										
						S	H	A	R	I		P	R	E	S	S								
G	O	B	I			S	Y	N	C	E	D													
A	G	E	N	D	A	S		G	E	N	I	P	A	P										
G	L	A	D	E	S					I	N	S	O	L	E									
S	E	M	I	N	A	L		S	L	I	C	K	E	R										
						R	E	P	A	C	K		S	E	E	M								
C	U	B	E	B		C	H	I	P	S														
O	T	I	C			A	T	E		U	N	A	B	L	E									
B	E	N	T			B	A	R	K	L	I	Q	U	O	R									
O	R	A	L			E	T	U	I		C	U	R	B	S									
L	I	L	Y			D	E	B	T		K	A	R	S	T									

