

# THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

## Newsletter

Vol. 9 No. 2



February 2023

### SPINNING YARN – II

CONTINUED FROM JANUARY 2023

#### SPIN YOU A YARN . . . . .

Having read last month's newsletter you now know what all our ancestors had to go through just to prepare their wool or flax for spinning. We did not mention cotton as the cotton gin was not even invented until around 1800 and was not available to our early settlers who relied mainly on raising sheep and growing flax so these materials were readily available. Now that you have your prepared wool and flax in hand your next step in obtaining that new piece of clothing is to spin these materials into yarn or thread that can be used to weave and knit the clothing you want.

When visiting the Heritage Museum, one of the first exhibits you will notice when entering the lower level is that of the spinning wheels. Lined up one after the other, all unique and all used for different purposes and in different ways. So why this wide array of different spinning wheels when all essentially give you the same product – a length of yarn? That is in fact the most asked question by visitors – why are there so many different kinds?

The objective of this article is not to make world class spinners out of our readers and we are not going to go into any great detail. But once read, you should be able to identify the different wheels and know what they were used for.

Most of the wheels you will see have treadles which you can pump with your feet to make the wheel turn. However, early wheels were turned by hand. This type of wheel is what you probably think of when somebody mentions spinning wheel. It is commonly found as a decorative piece in people's homes.

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#### FEBRUARY WHAT'Z IT . . . . .

The February What's It would appear to owe its existence to an earlier tool and was based on it.



One of the earliest iterations was used by coopers. That tool had only one set of hand grips. It was further modified and adapted by wheelwrights who added the second set of handgrips. It was then adopted by carpenters and is the tool you see above.

Now to many folks what the above tool is may be obvious. But the challenge is to not only identify the tool but what did coopers use it for, what did wheelwrights use it for and of what use was it to carpenters.

The tool is 13" long, 3¼" wide and the base is 2" thick. The iron is 2¼" wide and on this tool has a straight cutting edge. While we won't tell you the name of the company that made it until next month, the stamping on the iron states:

SHEFFIELD

WARRANTED  
CAST STEEL

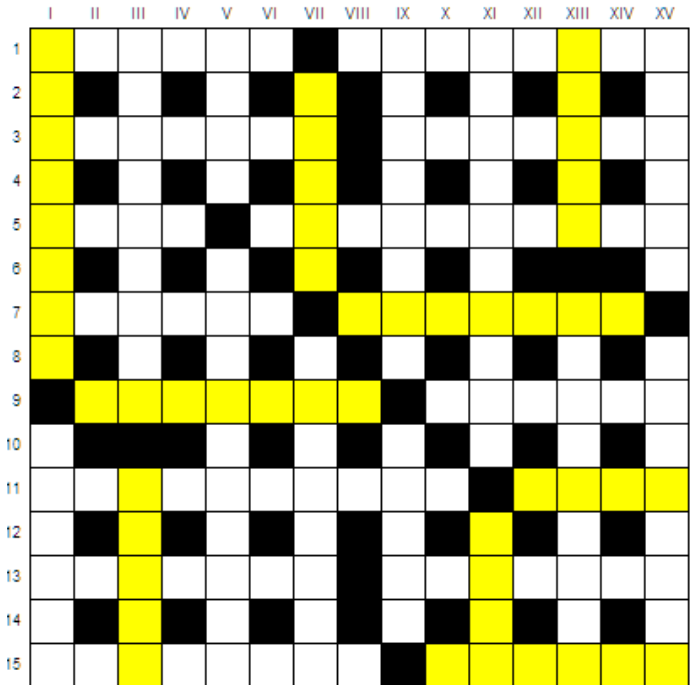
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(2)

# FEBRUARY THEME CROSSWORD

The **yellow** blocks contain the theme words and all come from the text of this newsletter. Enjoy and Happy Ground Hog's Day.

This is a French Grid Crossword. 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 7 adjoining open spaces and also has another 7 adjoining open spaces so this line also has two words. The same procedure would be used for the Down words. For example, Column II has no adjoining open spaces and so there are no words going down in Column II.



## Across

1. Action that conveys information  
Extra weight in the young
3. Cut off  
Not Weeping
5. A tune to carol  
Price too high
7. Feeling of sickness  
SPINNER'S FOOT LEVER
9. FLAX FIBER HOLDER  
Cassandra, e.g.
11. Small cafe  
SPUN FLEECE
13. Trade Ban  
Stipulated condition
15. Promiscuous female  
SHORN FROM SHEEP

## Down

- I. TURNING FIBER INTO YARN  
Entry
- III. Cluster of capillaries  
THIN STRAND OF THREAD
- V. A bit cracked  
Bowl shaped large drum
- VII. FABRIC WITH INTERLACED THREAD  
Situated at sea
- IX. Armpit  
Two-door auto
- XI. Study of mental illness  
THIS MONTHS WHAT'Z IT.
- XIII. TWISTS FIBER WHEN SPINNING  
Profitable
- XV. Arranges neatly  
Stick thin figure

# SPINNING WHEELS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE # 1

**GREAT WHEEL:** So let's start with the wheel you turn by hand. Known as the Great Wheel or Walking Wheel, it was one of the earliest types of spinning wheel. The raw fiber is held in the left hand and the right hand turns the wheel. It is useful when spinning short staple fibers such as wool where the fiber is usually only 2" to 3" in length\*. The name "walking wheel" refers to the technique used by the spinner where while they turn the wheel with their right hand they walk slowly backward away from the wheel to draw out the fiber in the left hand.

\*The opposite of short staple fiber is a filament fiber which comes in a continuous length.



**PRODUCTION WHEEL (CANADIAN):** This is often referred to as a treadle wheel. Rather than turning the wheel by hand, it was connected to foot treadles powered by the spinner's foot. The spinner sits and pumps the treadles which leaves both hands free for drafting the fibers. Drafting is a method of playing out the raw fiber with your hands. This controls twist and can determine the size of the yarn. This helps to speed up the spinning process thus improving production. This is especially important when doing short draft spinning which is useful with short staple fibers such as wool.

**CONNECTICUT CHAIR WHEEL:** So named because of its obvious chair shaped appearance. Often referred to as a Connecticut Wheel as that is believed to be its origin. This is also a high production wheel that spins rapidly. It is especially suited to spinning fine wool. By adding a distaff\* this wheel is also suited to the spinning of flax. You will recall that in last month's Newsletter we outlined the processing of raw flax using the hetchel.

\*A distaff is a tool (a short wooden staff) that is used to hold unspun fibers, especially flax, thus keeping them untangled.



**DOUBLE FLYER WHEEL (GERMAN):** Sometimes called a gossip wheel as they say two spinners can sit side by side and use the wheel at the same time – all the time exchanging the news of the day. But not all was rosy – as you could now spin with two hands, women in prison were made to produce more yarn. Others say that spinners in general used them on their own using both hands. Unlike the other wheels above, this wheel has two bobbins and flyers\*. It is especially useful for flax as you can see by the long distaff on top which will hold the unspun flax .

\*The wishbone shaped flyers have hooks that are used to spread the spun fiber across the bobbin.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE #3

**SPIN YOU A YARN . . . . .**

The spinning wheels on the previous page are only a representative sample. Over the centuries literally hundreds of different kinds of wheels evolved, many native to a particular country or region. Nonetheless the wheels on Page #2 are representative of several of the more common varieties and all can be found in the Heritage Museum. In addition, several other types of wheels can also be seen as well as a variety of distaffs, flyers and bobbins.



At this point we really need to give credit and thanks to our “Fiber Frau”, Pat Thalhauser. Over the years she has provided hands-on demonstrations of the fiber arts from spinning to dyeing to weaving at the town common and Heritage Museum. She has been a go-to person for questions and most of all she has donated the majority of items in the Museum’s fiber arts exhibit. Thank you, Pat. Ω

**PUZZLE SOLUTION**

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
1	S	I	G	N	A	L		P	U	P	P	Y	F	A	T
2	P		L		J		W		N		S		L		I
3	I	S	O	L	A	T	E		D	R	Y	E	E	Y	E
4	N		M		R		A		E		C		E		I
5	N	O	E	L		O	V	E	R	C	H	A	R	G	E
6	I		R		K		E		A		I				S
7	N	A	U	S	E	A		T	R	E	A	D	L	E	
8	G		L		T		O		M		T		U		B
9		D	I	S	T	A	F	F		O	R	A	C	L	E
10	A				L		F		C		Y		R		A
11	C	O	F	F	E	E	S	H	O	P		Y	A	R	N
12	C		I		D		H		U		T		T		P
13	E	M	B	A	R	G	O		P	R	O	V	I	S	O
14	S		E		U		R		E		O		V		L
15	S	T	R	U	M	P	E	T		F	L	E	E	C	E

**AGE GRACEFULLY –**

For those who think old age is coming at a really bad time, have you noticed:

- That people your age are sooo much older than you?
- That “On time” is when you get there?
- That if God wanted you to touch your toes he would have put them on your knees?
- That today’s 3-year-olds can switch on laptops and open their favorite apps. When you were three, you ate mud.
- That you’ve changed the name of the bathroom from “John” to “Jim” because it is so much more satisfying to say “I went to the gym this morning”?

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