

THE FRANCESTOWN HERITAGE MUSEUM

Newsletter

Vol. 10, No. 6



DOWNHILL

JUNE 2023

GOING DOWN HILL

We've all heard about the ingenious Yankee and necessity being the mother of invention, etc. Regardless there are times you have to ask yourself how did they go from this to that.

Back in Colonial Times the general store was then the place to go for a wide variety of hand tools. If they didn't have the one you wanted, the storekeeper usually had manufacturer catalogs where you could order what you needed. The mystery here does not lie with the general store or storekeeper but rather with the manufacturer of these items.

So winter is passing and spring is in the air, and our colonist faces planting 2 acres of corn – one kernel at a time in a hole dug by hand and covered back over by hand. Oh, the aching back, or at least it would have been until 1882 when Yankee ingenuity saved many a back. In 1882, Stephen Macomber of Grand Isle, VT invented and patented the “Stab Planter” (The actual Patent appears on Page 6 of this newsletter.) You the reader are in luck as it just so happens that the Heritage Museum has such a seeder for your viewing.

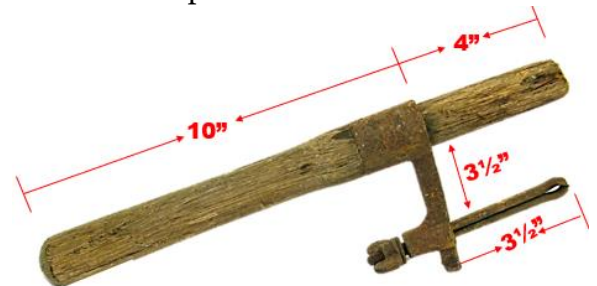


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JUNE WHAT'Z IT –



This month's WHAT'Z IT was a source of embarrassment for a number of folks (including yours truly) who should have known what they were. When first seen we all thought they looked familiar and several other people later thought the same but none of us could identify them. This was until one person took a look and immediately said “where did you get the _____.” Do you know what he said? Do you know what these are? They have to be used as a pair.



The first to correctly identify what these items are will win one of our coveted Life Time Passes to the Heritage Museum entitling them and their families to free entry to the museum. The value of this is not diminished by the fact that admission to the museum is free to anyone at all times.

Ω

(2)

JUNE THEME CROSSWORD (Sort of)

Since the theme of this issue of the Heritage Museum Newsletter is sleds and we pointed out the innovations that made sledding safer, we thought a reminder that trees and sledding are not always a good combination in spite of the innovations made to improve safety.

The last letter of 1 across is also the first letter of 3 across and the first letter of the second word in 2 down.



ACROSS

1. The theme of this newsletter
3. _ _ _ _ _ Runners
4. The conveyance depicted here

DOWN

2. Two words describing a “Flexible Flyer” innovation

(3)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE #1

Manufactured by the Potato Implement Company, the Acme Corn Seeder a/k/a a stab seeder was the colonist's tool of choice for sowing seeds. Since planting time, like most farming field chores, comes once a year, what is the Potato Implement Company supposed to do with that factory and all those workers in winter? What they needed was something to manufacture that is used only in winter so that they can go back to making seeders come spring. And that readers is where this article really starts to go downhill.

Downhill, as in "How about manufacturing sleds?" Like the early farm tools they were a combination of both wood and metal parts. The first sleds were crude by today's standards and appeared early in the 1700s.



These first sleds had wooden runners. They did not track well and were hard to steer. As mentioned, the farm equipment manufacturers were skilled in combining both steel and wood into finished goods and soon steel runners were added.

In 1899 Samuel Allen produced what became known as the Flexible Flyer sled. Here again, production took place in his farm equipment factory as a way to keep his workers busy outside of farming season.



These unique sleds with flexible steering were invented and patented in 1889. At first they were not a success and they were rejected by retailers. Even back then marketing was the name of the game and they began to focus the sales effort on toy departments in department stores (remember, we are up to the 1900s now and there were department stores). These older sleds are sought after by collectors these days, often selling for hundreds of dollars.

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Sled technology continued to evolve and in 1935 “safety runners” were introduced. You can see in the sled pictured above that the rear of the runner was straight and more than one unfortunate got impaled on them in sledding accidents. The safety runner had rounded rears. The lettering on the underside of the sled attests to “Safety Runners” and “Super Steering.”



At the beginning of this article we pointed out that the start of the commercial sled making industries was the purview of the farm equipment manufacturer. These manufacturers continued to be leaders in the making of sleds. The sled above with the safety runners was not made until 1935. Yet the underside of the tongue of the sled shows that it was made by the SL Allen Co. who were the manufacturers of Planet Jr. Farm & Garden Tools. The Heritage Museum has several Planet Jr. farm tools so on your next trip to the Heritage Museum, make a point of seeking out these pieces.



But let's not forget another favored way to go downhill, the toboggan. The Heritage Museum recently received a donation of a toboggan sled. Often homemade they combined a sled and a toboggan resulting in a toboggan, that in addition to carrying multiple riders, could be steered. The commercially manufactured ones were made by the South Paris Manufacturing Co. in South Paris, ME, where they still make sleds to this day.



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The toboggan sled was little more than a board with a set of sled type runners under the back and another set of runners under the front. The front runners were affixed to a small platform between the two runners. The only thing holding the long board of the toboggan to the front runners was a single steel pin that fit into a hole in the platform (colored yellow for illustration).

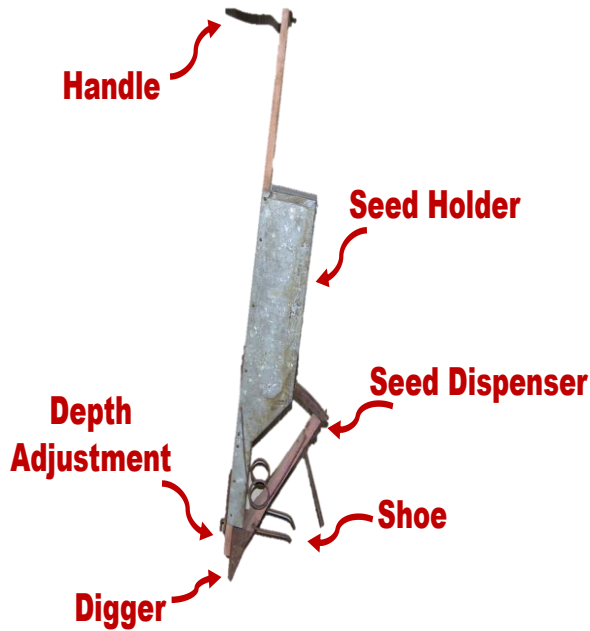


The above sleds and toboggans were built for recreation and fun. Previous issues of this newsletter have carried articles on the more practical sleds that were built for essential tasks on our ancestors' farms – to transport hay, milk, grain, firewood, etc. We will not go into any details on these but shown here are a few of these farm “work” sleds that you will see in the Heritage Museum. Ω



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A copy of the patent awarded to S. M. Macomber by the US Patent Office in 1882 appears at right. Below is a photo of the seeder located at the Francestown Heritage Museum.



While an improvement in having to bend over and dig a hole by hand for each seed, this was a vast improvement in the way to plant crops. Ω

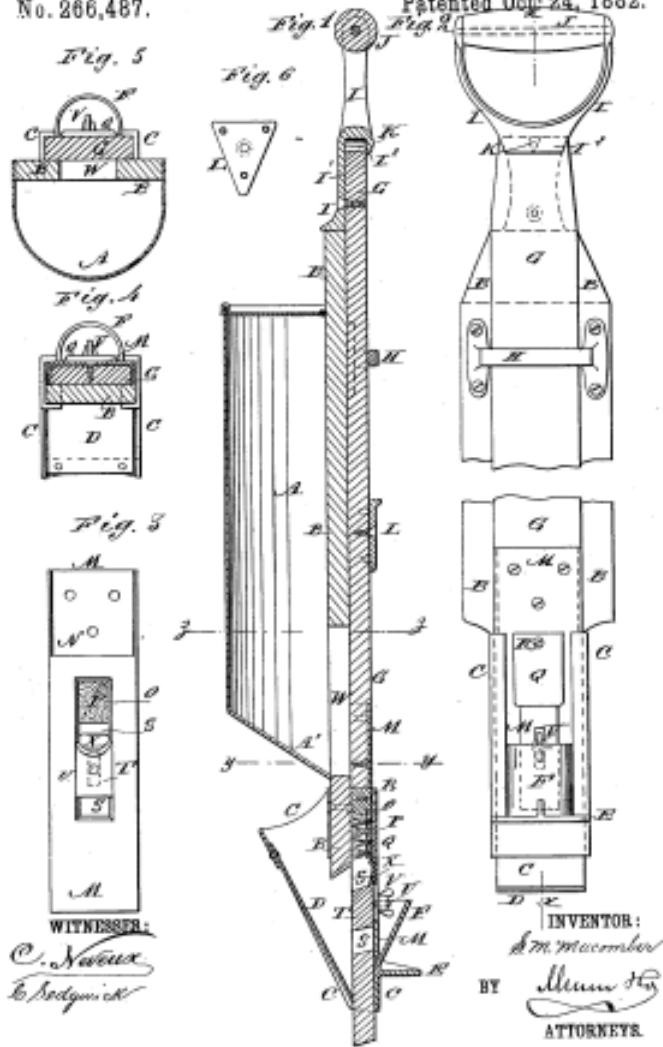
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(No Model.)

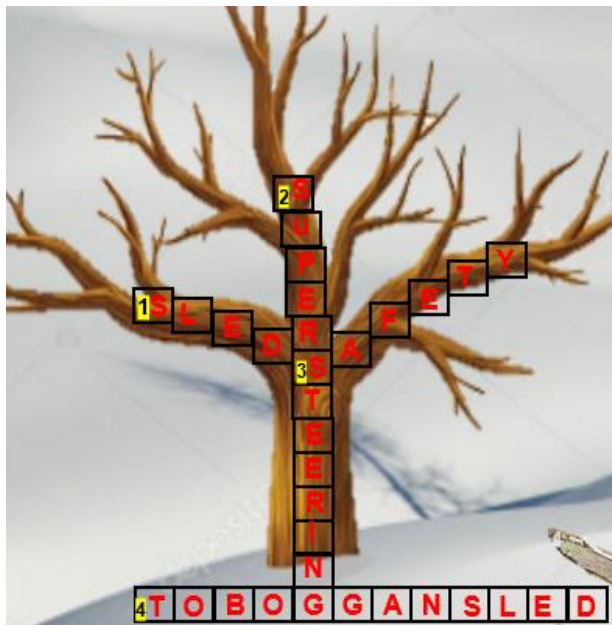
S. M. MACOMBER.
HAND CORN PLANTER.

No. 266,487.

Patented Oct. 24, 1882.



PUZZLE SOLUTION



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