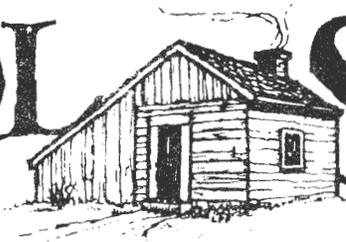


The TOOL SHED

No. 32



June 1984

A Journal of Tool Collecting published by CRAFTS of New Jersey

MORE ON THE NATIONAL SAW COMPANY: WITH SOME DISCUSSION OF HENRY DISSTON

by C.E.B.

In the last issue of The Tool Shed (April, 1984, p. 3) I wrote about the National Saw Company advertisement of March 25, 1895. The advertisement listed the general office of the company as being in Newark, N.J. It also stated that National Saw was "operating" four well-known saw manufacturers: Wheeler, Madden & Clemson Mfg. Co.; Richardson Bros.; Harvey W. Peace Co.; and Woodrough & McParlin.

In its ad National Saw boasted that it was "at the top and going to stay there." When one stops to remember that in 1895 the Henry Disston & Sons saw works in Philadelphia was probably the largest saw maker in the world, National's claim seems a little exaggerated.

Was National Saw Co. saying that it was topping Disston? Well, little did I know that when writing about National Saw Company I was probably writing about the Disston saw company in disguise.

In The Iron Age magazine of February 10, 1898 (p. 25), is a list of discounts for "current hardware prices." The companies listed under saws are: Atkins; Disston; C.E. Jennings & Co.; Peace; Richardson; Simonds; Wheeler, Madden & Clemson Mfg. Co.; and Woodrough & McParlin. Note that Disston and the four companies operated by National are all listed. More interesting is the identical notation found after the name of Disston and each of the other four companies: "list Jan. 1 '93."

This suggestion of a relationship between Disston and National is confirmed by Disston's 1902 price list.¹ A page in this list contains the names

of seventeen saw firms owned by Disston and the years in which they were acquired. The four firms operated by National Saw are included in this list. Disston acquired Richardson Bros. and Harvey W. Peace Co. in 1890 and Wheeler, Madden & Clemson and Woodrough & McParlin in 1893.

The pattern of corporate mergers in this period is confusing and difficult to follow. But I think it is safe to say that the National Saw Company of Newark, N.J., was some type of subsidiary of the Henry Disston & Sons saw

[Continued on page 5]

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LAST MEETING OF
1983-1984 YEAR TO BE
HELD ON JUNE 3rd

CRAFTS of New Jersey will hold its fifth and final meeting of the 1983-84 year on Sunday, June 3, at East Jersey Olde Towne in Piscataway.

The meeting will begin at 1:00 pm with the Swap & Sell. The formal program will begin at 2:00.

The speaker who was originally scheduled will not be able to attend. However, Program Chairman Fred Shippey did not have to look far for a replacement. Alexander Farnham graciously acceded to Fred's last-minute plea and agreed to speak on "New Jersey Tool Makers." Alex's new book, Early Tools of New Jersey and the Men Who Made Them, is fresh from the presses, so it would not be surprising if he had some copies for sale (list price, \$20; to members of CRAFTS, \$18).

The business portion of the June 3
[Continued on page 3]



Collectors of Rare and Familiar Tools Society of New Jersey

- President _____ STEPHEN ZLUKY, Whitehouse
Vice President _____ HARRY J. O'NEILL, Annandale
Secretary _____ BARBARA FARNHAM, Stockton
Treasurer _____ JOHN M. WHELAN, Murray Hill

Membership in CRAFTS is open to anyone interested in early trades and industries, and the identification, study and preservation of tools and implements used and made in New Jersey.

The Tool Shed

Published five times per year for members of CRAFTS of New Jersey. Editor: Robert Fridlington, 8 Keith Jeffries Ave., Cranford, NJ 07016.

SPEAKER PROFILE
ALEXANDER FARNHAM

Alexander Farnham, the featured speaker for the June 3 meeting, is an old friend to members of CRAFTS and to members of the tool-collecting fraternity generally.

A renowned artist, whose beautiful paintings grace private, corporate, and museum collections, Alex has received more than one-hundred awards in major art exhibitions.

Alex began collecting early tools and other Americana more than thirty years ago. His writings on tools and tool-related subjects are well known.

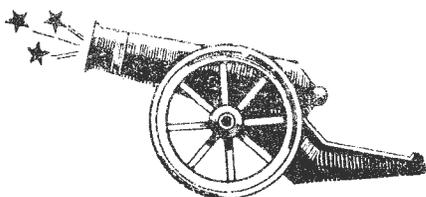
Many collectors developed their interest through one or another of Alex's three 'Tool Collectors Handbooks,' the first of which was published in 1970.

THE FOURTH OF JULY AT EAST JERSEY OLD TOWNE

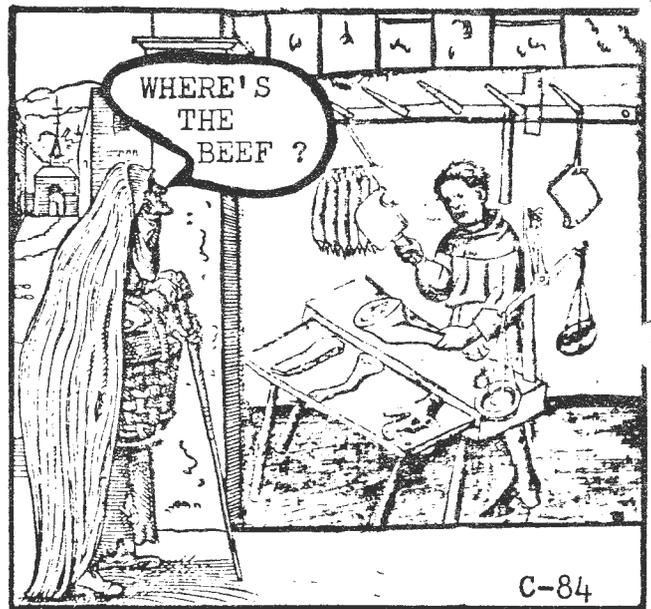
This year as in the past, East Jersey Olde Towne in Piscataway will sponsor an old-fashioned Fourth of July celebration, and once again CRAFTS of New Jersey will be on hand to demonstrate early tools and crafts.

The demonstrations by CRAFTS have been an extremely popular feature of the festival for several years, with a great appeal to both the old and the young.

If you are interested in joining the celebration and participating in the CRAFTS exhibit and demonstration, please get in touch with Steve Zlucky of Harry O'Neill.



Tools & Art



C-84

CRAFTS MEMBER PAYS
RECORD PRICE FOR CROWN MOLDER

by Alexander Farnham

Among our members are avid tool collectors who think nothing of establishing new records for prices paid at auction for antique tools. This especially true when it comes to molding planes.

The first of these high priced planes I was privileged to see sold was bought by a CRAFTS member who, with his wife, has authored what I consider the most helpful guide ever written on American wooden planes. The plane he bought was marked CESAR CHELOR / LIVING IN WRENTHAM, and was sold at a J.P. Bittner auction in 1982 for \$2700.

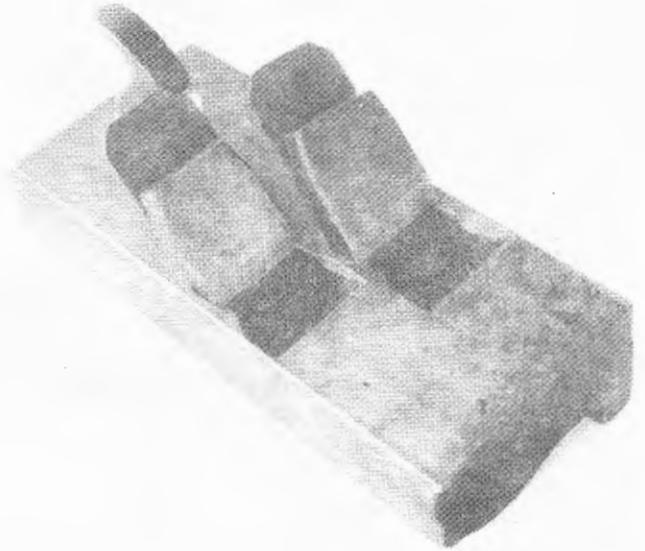
At a sale held by the same auctioneer in 1983, our only Rhode Island member paid \$6600 for a Miller patent plane, considered by many to be the prototype of those manufactured by the Stanley Rule and Level Company. This collector-dealer was quoted in the April, 1984, issue of Yankee Magazine as saying that if necessary he would have paid \$15,000 for the plane and today would not sell it for \$50,000.

The tradition of big spending by CRAFTS members was upheld once again at an auction held by Barry Hurchalla at the Ridge Fire Co., south of Pottstown, Pa., on March 31. At least two of our Philadelphia members were embroiled in a bidding battle for possession of a 6½" x 15½" two-bladed crown molding plane by Philadelphia planemaker Benjamin Sheneman.

The winner, a large friendly gentleman who was one of the earliest members of CRAFTS, paid \$2050 for the privilege of carrying the Sheneman plane back to Philadelphia. Anyone who has attended tool auctions within one-hundred miles of Philadelphia during the past quarter century knows this collector-dealer to be rather persistent when it comes to bidding for a tool he wants. There are not many that he does not get.

One of the underbidders for the Sheneman plane was CRAFTS' own talented and adored sculptress from Philadelphia, who told me after the auction that she had set a limit of \$800 that she was willing to pay for

the plane (I wonder if Carl had anything to do with her setting that limit).



6½" x 15½" two-bladed crown
molding plane made by
Benjamin Sheneman: \$2050.

Whoever the final underbidder was, he must have set himself a limit of \$2,000. If he had not, there is no telling what price the plane might have brought. One thing is certain: The 6½"-wide, two-bladed crown molder went to a good home where it will be well cared for among many other fine tools.

It is probable that we have not seen the last of CRAFTS' big spenders.

* * * * *

[Meeting, continued from page 1]
meeting will include the annual election for directors and officers of the Society.

Harry O'Neill and Chuck Granick will submit their final report on the May 12 auction, and members will be brought up to date on the plans and program for the Early American Industries Association meeting, which will be held at Drew University in Madison, June 14-16. The afternoon's program will close with the "Whatsit?" session. The next meeting will be in September.

* * * * *



EDITOR'S CORNER

A Moncke on My Back

Carl Bopp, who always proofreads "The Tool Shed" after it has been printed, went over the last issue with his usual care. Had we, he inquired, misspelled the name of the inventor of the monkey wrench in Fred Kingsbury's article on wrench collecting? Of course we had! We do these things to keep Carl on his toes.

Fred had given us the name as Charles Moncke; we printed it Charles Monke.

Carl is not a stranger to Mr. Moncke. He even wrote a short piece about him for "The Tool Shed" in November, 1981. But Carl said that his name was Charles Moncky and that he lived in Brooklyn, N.Y. (which is a long way from London, England!). When questioned on these points, he only smiled.



"Enough of this monkey business," we said. "What evidence is there that Charles Moncke/Moncky invented anything?"

Two days later we received an envelope in the mail. The sender was anonymous, but the postmark said "South Jersey." Inside the envelope was a card from the highly popular board game "Trivial Pursuit." And there it was: "What tool did Charles Moncke invent?"

You know the answer. That puts you in the "genius" category.

A Tip of the Hat to Bob Nelson

We want to thank Bob Nelson of PATINA for the nice publicity he gave the CRAFTS Spring Auction in the last issue of the PATINA-GRAM, even though the auction conflicted with PATINA's May meeting.

Bob had some kind words to say about Herb Kean, who also wields the gavel at PATINA auctions. Herb, he said, "has to be considered as fine a tool auctioneer as is to be found anywhere."

In the same issue of PATINA-GRAM Gene Kijowski adds his praise for Herb's auctioneering talents and refers to Herb's "charming personality and wit."

How are we going to keep him down on the farm now?

The Gentle Craft

One point that was not mentioned during Ray Townsend's excellent presentation on "Early Shoemaking" at CRAFTS April meeting is that shoemaking was traditionally known as "the gentle craft."

Though now obsolete, the term was commonly used as recently as the early twentieth century. The designation originated in the sixteenth century, and there are two different stories as to how it began.

According to one version, a prince by the name of Crispin was made to practice the trade of shoemaking in honor of his namesake, St. Crispin, the Patron Saint of Shoemakers. Any activity pursued by a prince had to be a "gentle" one—hence, the gentle craft.

The other version is a bit more lively. According to this tradition, King Edward IV, King of England from 1461 to 1470, once while in a disguise joined a group of shoemakers and hoisted a few with them. The King, grateful for the companionship (not to mention the drink!) bestowed the title on his new-found friends.

This second legend is alluded to in the Elizabethan play George-a-Greene (1599). In the play Edward, presumably well fortified, says to his drinking companions:

[Continued on page 5]

[National Saw, continued from page 1] works in Philadelphia.

This trend toward business consolidation affected most areas of tool manufacturing. The same issue of The Iron Age that is cited above contains an editorial (p. 7) discussing how the Nicholson File Co., of Providence, R.I., used its subsidiary, the Great Western File Co., of Beaver Falls, Pa., to acquire the McClellan File Co., of Saginaw, Mich. With this addition, Nicholson File Company controlled and operated "five distinct factories."

Some further comments about Henry Disston might be appropriate here. Disston's early history as a saw maker is not clear. Different sources give different names for the company that he started with and from which he is said to have taken "semi-finished articles ... in lieu of wages due."

John S. Keababian cites one source as saying the firm was Lindley, Johnson and Whitecraft and another source as saying it was William and Harvey Johnson.² The 1919 Disston Handbook on Saws gives yet a third name—William and Charles Johnson.

From what little information I have been able to find, I have concluded that it was probably William and Charles Johnson. This firm went out of business about 1840 and was succeeded by Johnson and Conway.³ The date given for the beginning of Henry Disston's firm is also 1840.

None of the sources I have consulted mentions what must have been an early partnership of Henry Disston and William Toland. The Atwater Kent Museum in Philadelphia has a back saw stamped "DISSTON & TOLAND—CAST STEEL." I first saw this saw about eight years ago. At that time there was a much yellowed tag with it that said the saw was made about 110 years ago and had been given to the museum by the Disston Company. Unfortunately, the tag did not say 110 years from when. The personnel at the museum could not answer any of my questions about either the saw or the tag.

A limited search of Philadelphia directories for 1842, 1844, and 1849 showed William Toland as a saw maker in 1844: "Toland William, sawmr, 31 Farmer St." The same directory lists: "Disston Henry, saw mr, rear 99 Mul-

berry" (Mulberry is now Arch Street).

A recent call to the Atwater Kent Museum revealed that it still has the saw, though no longer on display. The museum's records show William Toland as a saw maker from 1843 to 1846, but they contain no information on a partnership with Henry Disston.

Thus, the facts about Disston and Toland remain a mystery—at least to me.

Notes

¹Copy of a page supplied by Erv Schaffer. It will be included in his update on North American hand-saw makers in a future issue of The Gristmill.

²John S. Keababian, "Early American Factories: The Disston Factory, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania," The Chronicle, XXIII (September, 1970), p. 40n.

³The latest record I can find of William and Charles Johnson is that they displayed at the Franklin Institute Fair in 1840. In an 1849 directory Johnson & Conway advertised that they were "Late W. & C. Johnson."

* * * * *

[Editor's Corner, continued from page 4]

Marry, because you have drank with
the King,
And the King hath so graciously
pledged you,
You shall no more be called shoe-
makers;
But you and yours, to the world's
end,
Shall be called the trade of the
gentle craft.

Just how widely this term was used in America is not clear; but it does appear to have dropped out of usage here before it did in England—perhaps because the trade of shoemaking disappeared in America earlier.

If the Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier is correct, the term was already old-fashioned by the mid-nineteenth century. The opening lines of Whittier's "The Shoemakers," from Songs of Labor (1850), read:

Ho! workers of the old time styled
The Gentle Craft of Leather!
Young brothers of the ancient
guild
Stand forth once more together!

* * * * *

CRAFTS AUCTION—WOW!

The CRAFTS Spring Auction, held May 12, was a huge success—even though it took a little time to realize just how successful it really was.

Because of the overwhelming turnout last year, extra chairs had been set up. As it turned out, they were not needed; attendance was down. Last year the auction drew a record 153 bidders; this year there were "only" 102.

There were loads of good tools and much spirited bidding. Yet, there was an almost universal consensus among the assembled "experts" that prices were down, running well behind those of last year, which were rather high.

Everyone agreed that it was a good auction. It just seemed that it was not as successful as the one in 1983.

When the sales figures were tallied at the end of the day, the total was \$25,923.50. This beat last year's total by \$220.50 and set a new CRAFTS auction record!

Special thanks go to Chuck Granick, Harry O'Neill, Herb Kean, Joe Hauk, Jack and Helen Whelan, and Markay Zlucky for an outstanding job!

E.A.I.A. SPRING MEETING
JUNE 14-16 IN MADISON, N.J.

CRAFTS of New Jersey will host the Spring 1984 Meeting of the Early American Industries Association, June 14-16, at Drew University in Madison. Registration materials were mailed some weeks ago.

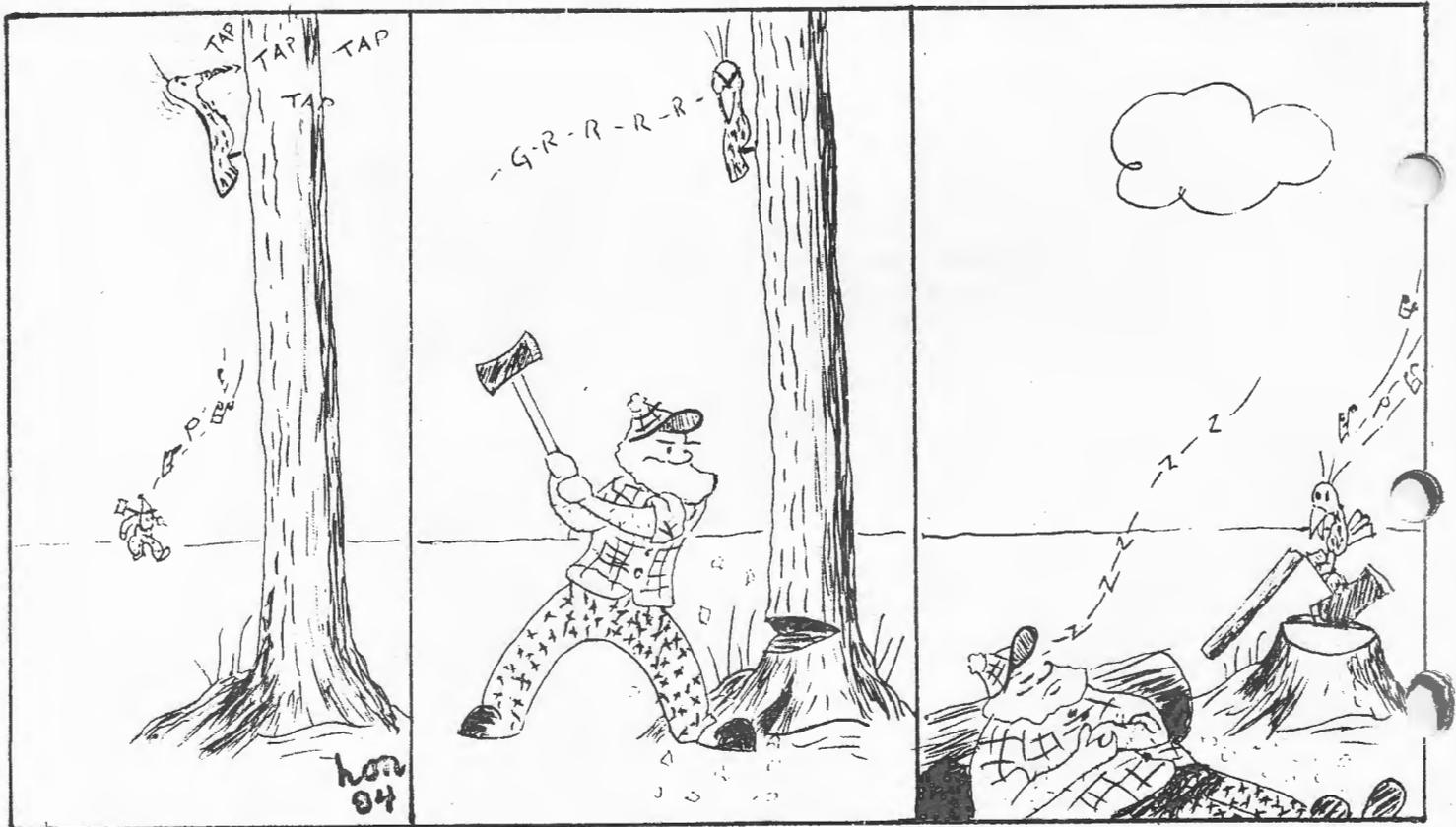
The registration fee is \$25 for members or \$35 for a member and spouse. Members of CRAFTS who are not members of EAIA do not have to pay the additional \$15 for EAIA membership.

Meals at Drew University are available as a package, which includes all meals from dinner Thursday evening through the Saturday evening barbeque, at \$55 per person. A cash bar will be available Friday and Saturday evenings.

Housing is available either in Drew University dormitory rooms or in nearby hotels.

A wide variety of programs and activities are scheduled, including a Friday evening tool exchange and a Saturday afternoon auction. In short, there will be something of interest for everyone.

There will also be a special exhibition of tools made in New Jersey.



ALEXANDER FARNHAM, "EARLY TOOLS OF
NEW JERSEY AND THE MEN WHO MADE THEM": A REVIEW

by Robert Fridlington

Alexander Farnham, Early Tools of New Jersey and the Men Who Made Them. Stockton, N.J.: Kingwood Studio Publications, 1984. Pp. 190. Hardbound, illustrations and index. Price: \$20.00. (SPECIAL PRICE to members of CRAFTS: \$18.00.) Order from: Alexander Farnham, R.D. 2, Box 365, Tumble Falls Road, Stockton, NJ 08559.

As a general rule a book review is not written by a person whose "encouragement and help" is acknowledged by the book's author. I have disregarded this rule for two reasons. First, I am simply one of a long list of individuals and institutions whom Alexander Farnham has thanked, and my "help" was so negligible that his recognition of it was a mark of graciousness. Second, and more important, this is such a superb book that I could not pass up the opportunity to say good things about it.

For nearly a decade, Farnham has been digging out obscure information on New Jersey tools and toolmakers. Now, it has all been brought together in this visually beautiful work. Its large (8½" x 11") pages are loaded with pictures—over three-hundred illustrations in all.

But this is not merely another picture book of tools. It contains a wealth of information on the history of toolmaking and on individual toolmakers.

The book is organized in sections dealing with the makers of specific tools, including: planes, saws, spirit levels, rules, hand tools, gauges, spokeshaves, hammers, carpenters' tools, general tools and housewares, woodworking machines, blacksmith-made tools, axes and edge tools, blacksmith and farrier tools, files and rasps, cutlery, plows, agricultural implements, and garden tools. Where appropriate, there are subsections. And so as not to miss anything, there is a section devoted to the makers of "miscellaneous tools."

They are all here. There are the well-known names: Mockridge & Francis; Richardson Bros.; C.S. Osborne & Co.;

and Fisher & Norris. There are also the obscure: John Frace of Newton, about whom virtually nothing is known, but who was included because of a single plow plane that bears his signature; S. Vail, a Morristown blacksmith, whose signature is found on a single axe; A. Bunnell, a bellows maker; and Alfred Henry Crockford, who manufactured (for about one year) a brace that he had invented.

On and on they come, parading across the pages. An accurate count of "the men who made them" is almost impossible; but the "Index of Early New Jersey Toolmakers" at the end of the book contains well over five-hundred entries.

Farnham draws a number of interesting conclusions. Toolmakers, he believes, enjoyed little social status or prestige in their communities, even though they were among the most skilled of craftsmen. Many of them lived hand-to-mouth existences, always on the edge of poverty. When they died, few left much of an estate.

During their working years they were constantly drifting in and out of partnerships. Farnham suggests that the constant need for new capital created the need for new partners and the money they brought with them.

Of course, some succeeded, some made money. Those who were successful in the toolmaking business, says Farnham, achieved their success because they "were more businessmen than craftsmen."

Part of the research for this work was supported by a grant-in-aid from the Early American Industries Association. Indeed, at one time EAIA planned to publish the book, but unfortunately, this was not to be. So much for lost opportunities.

At a time when regional tool groups have spurred interest and research in the history of toolmaking, this book will undoubtedly serve as a model for future state and local studies of a similar kind. Farnham has made a major contribution. He deserves nothing but bouquets.

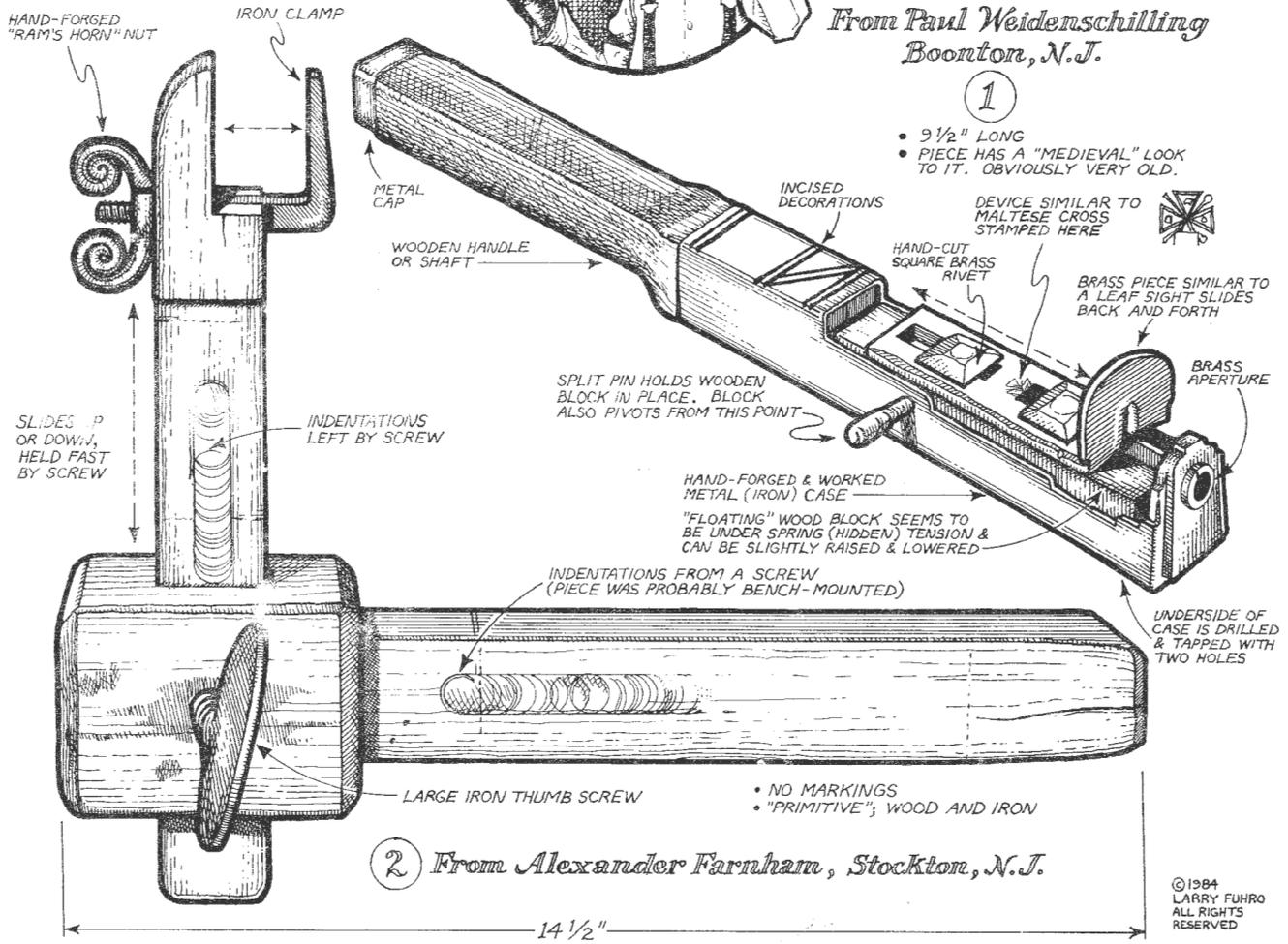
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Pop Rivet's What's It? No.14

by LARRY FUHRO



From Paul Weidenschilling
Boonton, N.J.



GADGETS · DOOHICKIES · THINGAMAJIGS · AND WHATCHAMACALLITS

IT'S THAT TIME AGAIN!
MEMBERSHIP DUES: 1984-1985

The membership year for CRAFTS of New Jersey runs from July 1 to June 30, so it is once again time to remind the forgetful about dues for the 1984-1985 year.

As postage and mailing costs have increased, it has become enormously expensive to bill each and every member as was done in the past. You can help reduce this cost by paying your next year's dues now. This will also save Treasurer Jack Whelan a great deal of

work.

So let's make June "Be Kind to Jack Whelan Month." Put your check for \$7.00 (or why not \$14.00 for two years?) in an envelope and mail it to:

Mr. John M. Whelan, Trea.
CRAFTS of New Jersey
38 Colony Court
Murray Hill, NJ 07974

Don't delay. Do it now, before you forget!
