

Tools of Yesterday III

Hinges Hinges such as those on display were intended for large doors, such as those on barns. The largest of barn doors were normally located about mid-point on the long side of the barn. Their purpose was to allow a wagon loaded with hay to enter and be off-loaded into the mows, located on either side.

Blacksmith shops produced this type of iron product. They most often purchased long strips of iron called merchant bars from the forges which they then converted into whatever shape was required by the customer.

In Colebrook, there were several blacksmith shops, the best known being Rockwell's and Sage's at the Center, Phelps' in North Colebrook and one associated with the forge in Robertsville.

Cream Separator Prior to the coming of electricity (which for parts of Colebrook such as North Colebrook and Beech Hill didn't occur until the late 1940s), the only way cream could be obtained except by letting it sit quietly in a container in a spring or some other cool spot until the cream rose to the top, where it could then be skimmed off and placed into another container, was the use of a hand-operated tool such as our cream separator. This one is known as a table model, as opposed to the larger floor model. Both worked the same way.

It is with some difficulty that the crank can be brought up to speed. The reason for this is that the gear ratio is very low in order to activate the interior mechanism, which is in effect a cyclotron. When the required number of revolutions are reached (the number is in the order of 15,000), the small metal ring on the handle, which made two clicks during the start-up phase, will become one click per revolution, letting the operator know that it is time to turn the rod inside the milk reservoir at the top until it reaches a stop. At this point, the milk begins to flow down into the rapidly spinning internal parts and cream will begin flowing from the top spout and skim milk will emerge from the lower. If, by chance, the operator begins turning the crank too fast, the single click per revolution will cease, alerting him to decrease the revolutions. By the same token, if the revolutions are allowed to drop below the required number, two clicks will signal the error. Peak efficiency is achieved at the one click per revolution speed.

In the early days, the separating of cream from milk was of great importance, as there were no markets for raw whole milk; refrigerators didn't exist, and the only dairy products that could be produced that had a shelf life were butter and cheese, both of which utilized cream. As a consequence, much, if not most skim milk was dumped except for what might be used for young stock of pigs. There have been pigs raised in Colebrook that never in their lives tasted plain water, subsisting entirely upon skim milk.

Of course it goes without saying that the term "skim milk" is derived from the practice of skimming off the valuable cream, leaving behind the relatively valueless "blue", or skim component of whole milk.

These machines had to be meticulously washed after each and every use, and all the many metal cones that comprise the working interior parts had to be individually scrubbed. The tiniest particle of material left behind would sour, causing the next batch of milk to be contaminated, and thus useless.

This particular separator was the responsibility of the boy of the family, whose duty it was to separate the milk, wash the machine and reassemble it before the car arrived to take him to the Center School. About 6:30 PM the same procedure had to be repeated. This had to be done 365 days a year. Today sometimes the question arises “what did you find to do before the days of television?” Well, here’s t of the answer!

Cant hook Why do we show you a specialized tool made solely for rolling logs into position? The answer lies in the fact that small farms such as ours in the hilly regions had to rely on every possible means of bringing in cash, whether it be in actual money or in the form of barter. Timber was (and is) one of our renewable cash crops. Around here its use traditionally has been for timber, firewood and charcoal. Charcoal manufacturing around here ceased a hundred years ago or more, but from the mid 1700s until very late in the 1800s, the need for charcoal was the underlying cause for our forests being clear cut not once, but several times. Therefore one might expect to see tools used in the timber trade in both a cow barn and in a lumber mill.

Milk pails The size of a milk pail reflected the quantity of milk the cows in a herd produced. After each cow was milked, the milk was deposited into a larger vessel, and then the next cow was milked, etc. Just prior to the era of milking machines, milk pails were 12-quart capacity, somewhat larger than these on display. Because the pail was held between the milker’s feet, it couldn’t be too large, but large enough to hold the total production of the average cow.

Some cows were more nervous than others, and consequently the milker had to be ready to pick the pail up in a hurry in case she picked her foot up and put it down in the pail! If this disaster occurred, it required that all the milk in the pail be dumped, and the pail would have to be brought into the kitchen to be washed. Most milk pails had wrinkled bottoms for this reason.

After prolonged use, pails would become rusty, or for some reason no longer be acceptable as a milk pail. Quite often they would begin a new life as a blueberry pail. The average blueberry picker today does so for recreational purposes or at most to gather for a pie or muffins. A serious picker might harvest several quarts or perhaps even a few gallons, which would then be frozen for future use. This was not the case in earlier times when every possible source of income had to be utilized. The small farms in hill towns such as Colebrook could not rely upon cows as the single source of income. Maple sugar and syrup in the spring, blueberries in the summer, garden produce and fruit crops in the fall and perhaps a harvest of ice in the winter if the farm had a pond of sufficient size, all were employed to make financial ends meet. There were several locations in Colebrook where there was good berry picking; the Mt. Pisgah area, Beech Hill and the east side of the Farmington River in The River were three such areas. In the late 19th century, a firm in Albany, New York bought up all the blueberries produced in the Colebrook River area. In some cases it brought in the largest proportion of income of all the possibilities that existed on these farms.

Historic Bytes

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