

Tools of Yesterday IV

Crosscut saws On display here are the two types of crosscuts, the early model and the modern one. The dividing year is 1875, when the swallow-tailed tooth called a “raker” was invented. It must have been immediately accepted, as a saw without these specialized teeth could be used to cut up a tree once it had been dropped, but couldn’t be used to cut the tree down. The reason for this is that the raker teeth eliminated sawdust from the curf, or cut, which would, if left in there, bind the saw so that it could be neither pulled nor pushed. If the saw was in a perpendicular position however, sawdust was not a problem. All trees felled prior to 1875 had to be chopped down with an axe – a tiring, long-lasting task at best.

The black saw tells us two tales; one that it was made prior to 1875, and secondly that at some point in its life, it was broken in two. Yankee frugality and ingenuity comes into play at this point. Instead of looking upon it as something to be thrown away (perish the thought!), holes were drilled in the larger part and a metal sleeve applied to hold a handle, thus converting the remnant into a one man saw. As someone who has had a great deal of experience with crosscut saws (with raker teeth), I must say that I have great empathy for anyone who didn’t have a better saw than this one. Even with sharp teeth with proper set, I shudder to think of having to cut anything harder than butter with it!

Teamwork was the key to using a two-man crosscut. Each man pulled when the saw was furthest from him, and on the return trip, your hands steadied the saw so that it wouldn’t “shalley”, or wobble, and nothing more; you absolutely never pushed. The weight of the saw did the cutting.

If the invention of raker teeth was a well-received innovation, the coming of the chain saw after WWII was a revolution. Felling trees would never be the same.