

Exhibition Dates: April 24 – October 4, 2014

Changing Times:

Hand Tools Before the Industrial Revolution

Connecticut Tools of the Trades
from the Walter R.T. Smith Collection



Walter R.T. Smith, tool collector *extraordinaire*, and an Emeritus Trustee at the Society, delved into his personal collection for this exhibition. His selections illustrate the diverse tools any Connecticut farmer would have had on hand prior to the Industrial Revolution. Many of the tools displayed were made in and around Wilton.

Born in the Dantown section of Stamford in 1922, he began his career as a builder, and started his tool collection more than 65 years ago. Mr. Smith has amassed more than 4,000 tools used by nearly three dozen trades and crafts typical of the work done in a New England community in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The Wilton Historical Society's Abbott Barn houses more than 600 additional tools, most donated by Mr. Smith.

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Wilton Historical Society

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Wilton Historical Society



1 Interesting, But Boring Tools

When they needed to drill holes for pegs or pins, pre-industrial woodworkers used augers to do the job. These wood boring tools made holes of all sizes, and were employed in the construction of ships, houses, and barns. Simple tools, augers are shaped like a T, with a metal drilling shaft and crossing wooden handle. Note the “worm” at the end of the shaft, which acted as a screw to center and improve the efficiency of the tool.

T-handle Auger with spiral and screw, c. 1840

Crank Auger with spiral and screw, c. 1860

T-handle Nose Auger, c. 1790

English Brace, copper clad, c. 1850

T-handle Auger with spiral and screw, c. 1840



2 Looking Through the Windows of History

This display of windows from 1772 -1890 reflects in part the evolution of the availability of glass. The Crown prohibited glass making; the pane size of 6” x 8” was dictated by English exports. When local glassmaking began, the pane size increased and the muntin (dividing) bars became smaller, until by the late 1800’s a typical window might have only three large panes, with two panes over one.

Window sash, six over nine, 7” x 9” glass, c. 1810

Ridgefield, Connecticut

Window sash, twelve panes, 6” x 8” glass, 1772

Raymond House, Wilton, Connecticut

Window sash, six panes, 9” x 12” glass, 1852

Fitch House addition, Wilton, Connecticut

Window sash, two over one, 13” x 25” over 26” x 28” glass, 1890

Partrick House, Wilton, Connecticut



3 A-Tisket A-Tasket, Let’s Make A Basket

How did people carry or store food and other household items before plastic bags and cardboard boxes? In baskets. Baskets were essential in any establishment and were made in various shapes and materials, from strips of wood to grasses. Standard sizes, such as a bushel and a peck, were used to store and measure fruits and vegetables. Many Connecticut farmers made baskets for their own use, as well as for barter.

Stacked forms of individual basket molds for splint baskets, c. 1860’s

Drawknife, c. 1870

Used to make splints for basket

G.W. Bradley Company, Weston, Connecticut

Froe, c. 1850

Used to split out individual splint pieces

Froe club, c. 1850

For making pieces, used like a mallet

White ash wood

To make splints

Delamination: each layer is one year’s growth



4 Waiting for the Cows to Come Home

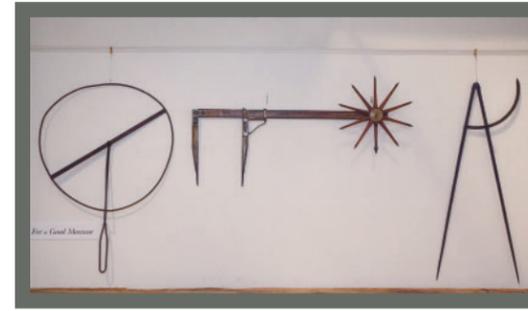
With a cow, a family had access to milk, cream, cheese, butter, and meat, which could be consumed, sold, or bartered. Once yoked, cattle were beasts of burden, capable of pulling a plow, or stumps out of the ground, or pulling logs through the woods for fences and building projects. A cow was a valuable asset on a farm, and the farmer needed a couple of simple devices, like a yoke and a bell, to keep track of it – early GPS!

Cow poke, c. 1890

Used on cows to prevent them from jumping fences

Cow bell, c. 1890

Placed on lead cow in the field



5 For Good Measure

As there were few reliable scales, most measures of food and drink were based on the typical cup and spoon that everyone owned. A hand-made ruler and “natural units” such as an arm’s length (a yard), the width of a thumb (an inch) and a man’s foot (12”) were easy ways to measure for smaller scale projects around the home and barn. For larger or more complicated measurements, ingenious Yankee craftsmen invented specialized tools.

Waywiser, c. 1860

Used by surveyors to measure land distances

Log Caliper with weighted pinwheel, c. 1880

6” between spokes measures 10’ along load in one run;

Caliper end measures diameter of log

Log scale diameter times length calculates number of

board feet possible from the log

Shipbuilder’s winged dividers, c. 1840



6 The Connected Load

Before the age of the steam engine, overland transportation was made possible by animals. Horses and oxen pulled most every kind of vehicle. To carry people, there were carriages, buggies and coaches. Goods were transported by cart, wagon and dray. Draft horses and yoked oxen worked in the fields pulling plows, seeders and reapers. Even humans used yokes to move pails of milk, water or syrup.

Wooden yoke, c. 1875

For carrying buckets of water or maple sap

Gift, Walter R.T. Smith

2003.20.1

Oxen yoke, c. 1850

Horse Collar with connected hames, c. 1860

Leather, stuffed with straw

Gift, Walter R.T. Smith

2004.5.120



7 The Iceman Cometh

In the early 1800’s, food was preserved through salting, spicing, pickling or smoking. Butchers slaughtered only enough for the day’s trade, and easily spoiled food such as milk, butter, eggs, fruit and vegetables could only be sold locally. Ice harvesting took place every winter; it was an arduous process, and very labor intensive, requiring many men and horses. Farmers generally kept their ice, but might sell or barter some.

Pry bar, c. 1880

Used to separate cakes of ice after they are sawn

Ice saw, c. 1880

Used on delivery wagon to make ice blocks smaller

Ice tongs, c. 1880

Used to lift ice blocks on pond and delivery wagon

Unique design with hickory handle

Gruman Ice Tools, Branchville, Connecticut

Ice marker, hand-pushed, c. 1885

Used to lay out ice field for sawing on pond

Gruman Ice Tools, Branchville, Connecticut



8 Make Hay While The Sun Shines

As essential as it was to own a cow or horse, it was as even more important to grow hay to feed them. “Timothy” grass hay was the preferred type to grow in this area for horse and cattle fodder. Hay was a critically needed product – as important as gasoline or diesel fuel is today – to keep farms going and to support transportation by animal-drawn vehicles.

Scythe, European pattern, c. 1820

Straight handle, hammered blade, probably from Pennsylvania

Hay knife, “Lightning” pattern, c. 1880

Used to get hay from haystack or barn loft, Connecticut made

Hay spade, c. 1840

Used to get hay from haystack or barn loft

Hay Thief, c. 1870

Used to get hay from haystack or barn loft