



Lest We Forget

by Bob Roger

Lest We Forget is a series of short articles, each about a tool or implement that was once a common household, farm, or trade necessity, but whose use or existence may soon be forgotten.

Carpet Clamps

This heavy-duty clamp measures 4.5 inches long and 0.75 inches wide, and weighs about ½ pound. It is marked “PAT NOV 15 04” and is an example of Patent # 775,034 issued to Lewis Grape of Canajoharie, NY.

There were several patents in the late 19th century for what we call clothes pins. They were (and still are) used for hanging laundry on the clothes line for drying. These pins were generally light weight and the early ones were made of wood. Some of us probably collect them. When it came to cleaning carpets and rugs, I used to take them outdoors and drape them over the clothes line and beat them with a rug beater. Some of us probably collect them also.

The heavy rugs usually fell off the line during the beating process, and had to be repeatedly picked up and re-draped over the line. A lot of you are grinning right now because you remember how difficult the rug beating job was, especially for youngsters. We could not use clothes pins to hold the rugs on the line because they were too fragile for the heavy rugs.

That is the problem Lewis Grape solved with his heavy steel carpet clamp. The jaws are held open with a spring and closed with a solid wing nut, and the clamp holds the carpet on the line even during the heaviest of beatings. Vacuum cleaners replaced rug beaters at least 50 years ago, but let us not forget the carpet clamp and how it made a difficult task easier.

But there is another reason why this tool is relevant to M-WTCA. Lewis Grape (1844-1924) was Willis Barshied Jr's great-grandmother's brother-in-law. Willis is one of M-WTCA's longest serving members and for over 50 years has been working to preserve the local history (including tools) of the Stone Arabia region near Canajoharie, NY. This carpet clamp is but one example of the thousands of tools covering just about every early trade of the region that Willis has assembled, documented, and has on display.

I recently visited Willis and was given the cook's tour of his restored buildings and his collections. He generously provided me with this clamp and its background. I found it truly amazing to see what one determined person can do to develop the knowledge of and attempt to preserve the early tools of a region. Thanks, Willis.



Email or mailing address change?

Please send changes to Kerry McCalla at kmccalla@bellsouth.net.