

THE MYSTERY OF HISTORY — FEBRUARY 1, 2021

WHAT'S IT?



Fig. 1 (left-right): Front, back and side views. PHOTO: © 2019 Norman J. Frisch

ARTIFACT 21-01

SPECIFICATIONS:

Material: Forged iron? Overall length = 27.94 cm (11 in). Handle (proximal end side view):

Width = 1.75 cm (11/16 in), thickness, curved cross-section = 0.32 cm (1/8 in);

(distal end face view): Width = 0.95 cm (3/8 in), thickness = 0.64 cm (1/4 in).

Head: Height = 2.22 cm (7/8 in), width = 2.38 cm (15/16 in).

Weight: 384 gm (0.85 lb)

continued...

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Fig. 2 (left-right): Closeup of artifact in figure 1, front, back and side views. PHOTO: © 2019 Norman J. Frisch

ARTIFACT 21-01**CLUES:**

Sometimes the best clue to what the function of an artifact/tool might have been used for, is the context, i.e., where the artifact was found. This tool was found on an 1870s farm that was originally used as a change out station for big draft horses. As the canal was enlarged over time the barges hauling cargo were also enlarged. Bigger loads meant bigger animals to provide more pulling power.

Tools similar to this artifact were used to mold bullets during the Civil War era, so, it's a good bet that this tool was somehow involved with hot metal. Large draft horses and hot metal—can you make a connection that may give you an idea of what this tool might have been used for?

BTW, this tool has been repurposed and is currently being used to lift cast iron lids off pots of water being boiled on a wood stove—an early version of humidifiers.

ANSWERS ARE ON THE FOLLOWING PAGE !

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WHAT'S IT?**ARTIFACT 21-01****ANSWER:**

This artifact has conjured up several creative guesses as to what this implement might be and/or how it was used. In general, it is a standard design hand tool with reversed leverage handles via a fulcrum to apply extreme pressure at the business end of the unit—pliers are another example. Given the context of where this item was discovered, an 1870's farm, it follows that this tool was used to make some type of farm work possible or more efficient, e.g., attaching a metal ID tag to a new born calf's ear. Given the context, there are host of farm associated tasks where this tool might be used.

Let us move out of the context "box" for a moment. This researcher found the closest match to this tool remarkably far from its contextual environs. Based

on photographic evidence, a most unlikely candidate emerged: the Mataeda Hasami, a concave cutter used to cut whole branches from bonsai trees. The slightly curved cutting area produces a clean cut that will heal over itself better than a less precise cut. This is considered the heaviest tool in bonsai tree trimming. There are several other smaller specialized tools used in trimming bonsai trees—when it comes to delicate cuts, leave this bad boy of bonsai in the box.

So, what do you think? We do not claim truth in our "answers"... we, like you, are searching for it and enjoy the surprises on our journey!

GUESSES:

From:
Seymour Library Prediction Box

Preston Beebe, "Most certainly a tooth puller."

Tony Vasquez, "Horseshoe trimmer / remover used to clip off bad or dead hoofs of a horse to reshoe horse."

Michael K. Ihar [?], "Casting mold – used to forge nails for horseshoes."

Cody Irwin, "Clamps used to hold hot metal in place during blacksmithing."

Charlotte Zipkey, "Plyers / tooth puller."

Caleb Wong, "I think it might have been used as clippers, because it can be hinged back and forth and one end is pointy."

Ron Wood, "Cutters for wire or molten metal used by a metalsmith or blacksmith."

From:
Brockport Community Museum Facebook Page

— They are for picking up and holding horseshoes as they were being heated up and hammered, then dunked into water

continued...

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From:

Remembering Brockport Facebook Page

- tooth extraction tool
- Ice tongs
- Ice clamps/tongs for the ice man to carry the ice
- Nail puller for horseshoes?
- First thought was a blacksmith tool for horse hooves.
- Farrier's tool, nail puller/cutter for horseshoes
- Dr Craw's tooth yanker!!!!
- Ice holders for block ice!
- Looks like the broken handles of ice claws. Picks up chunks of ice for the ice house?
- I was a child visiting my Grandfather's cottage when his friend and neighbor Oscar Nichols, also from Brockport had the "ice house" and would let me watch him cut a piece for our "ice box", no electricity up in Kasshabog lake at that time.

— The ice tongs were much larger, as they had to open 12 to 18 inches or so, to get around large blocks of ice - ice tongs had twin wooden handle to help carry/pull the ice, as well as have a way to dig into the ice - and, the grabbing tips were sharp points, to grip the ice - not having a good look at the length of the handles, they are a type of pliers - one guess would be something used in blacksmith work, to hold the steel while heating it and forming it!

— When "Pulling Ice " at the Brockport Cold Storage with Roger Trimmer, we used large tongs for 300# ice blocks. Tongs used to pull ice blocks onto skids. What a job.

— Used by Dr. Yankem, DDS.

From:

Remembering Clarkson Facebook Page

— Some kind of pliers or clamp like. I've seen them but can't remember what they're called. It's been a long time.

GUESSERS:

What a great bunch of answers! It sure seems that the most likely use was for the process of shoeing farm animals. Of course tools are also sometimes used for other purposes than originally designated. But, ouch, if you saw the actual size of this implement it might be a bit more evident that it would be a bit too large to fit in anyone's mouth too easily—so likely not a tooth puller (at least for humans). On the other hand, the "business end" is a bit small to pick up the blocks of ice once used for refrigeration in the olden days. Remember that while photographs online can be helpful, there is nothing like seeing things yourself firsthand. [—Ed.]

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WHAT'S IT?

BACKGROUND

“WHAT’S IT?” has been a feature of the BCM website since its inception in 2007. In 2017 Brockport Community Museum board member Archer “Buck” Noble, a Brockport Central School District teacher (now retired) developed “The Mystery of History” school project that encouraged fourth and fifth grade students to use observational and investigative techniques to help determine the type and use of different historic artifacts.

That project was introduced to the general public during a Brockport Community Museum outreach presence at the 2017 Brockport Sidewalk Sale. That success led to this collaboration between the Brockport Community Museum, Seymour Library and Brockport Central School District.

GET INVOLVED

- **Take your best guess** regarding the current artifact.
- **Do you have an artifact** you would like to know more about? Open your query to a larger audience.
- **Have a suggestion** about how we can improve this project?

If so...

Leave your contact information in “Ye old prediction box” near the exhibit display.

CREDITS

Museum project committee

Archer “Buck” Noble

Norman Frisch

Seymour Library

Jennifer Caccavale, Director