

THE MYSTERY OF HISTORY — AUGUST 1, 2022

# WHAT'S IT?



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

## ARTIFACT 20-04A

### SPECIFICATIONS:

Material: Iron. Overall length = 27.31 cm (10 3/4 in),  
 overall width = 15.24 cm (6 in), overall depth = 4.76 cm (1 7/8 in),  
 stock thickness = 0.95 cm (3/8 in), hole diameter = 0.79 cm (5/16 in).

Pulley: Diameter = 8.89 cm (3 1/2 in), depth = 1.27 cm (1/2 in).

Weight = 1.824 kg (4.02 lb)

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Fig. 2 (left-right): Front, back and side views. PHOTO: © 2019 Norman J. Frisch

## ARTIFACT 20-04B

### SPECIFICATIONS:

Material: Very badly corroded and warped iron with bolts.  
Length = 24.77 cm (9 3/4 in), width = 11.75 cm (4 5/8 in),  
depth = 5.72 cm (2 1/4 in). Weight = 1.253 kg (2.76 lb).

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**WHAT'S IT?****ARTIFACT 20-04****CLUES & QUESTIONS:***Horseshoes, Wheels, and Archaeology*

At first glance these artifacts look like modified horseshoes, but it looks like it would be awfully hard to get a ringer while pitching. The wheels are a bit of a mystery too, and since we've never seen a horse rollerblading, we can safely rule out these artifacts is being horseshoes. As with all of our previous artifacts, these two sport simple machines—the wheels—used to perform some type of work. The difference with this display is that we have an artifact that was used, buried, and excavated, and one that is “new” and unused. What are some of the differences and similarities between the two? If you only had the excavated (rusty) artifact, how would you go about trying to figure out what it was and how it was used? These are questions that archaeologists tackle. Even before an artifact is found there is a great deal of work that needs to be done before an artifact is discovered, for example, what is the history of the site they are examining, what procedure should be used to excavate a site that may contain artifacts, what other artifacts have been found in the area? Being the an archaeologist is like being a detective of the past—they are the “Black Belts” of the “WHAT”S IT?” world! Devices like this are still being produced and used around the globe. They can be found in barns, large factories, any place where large objects need to be moved in and out of storage. Happy detective work!

—Cheers... Archer Lowell Noble Jr., aka Buck

**ANSWER:***Being Wonderfully Unhinged!*

Imagine you are 19th century farmer trimming up the hooves of Aristotle, one of your draft horses. As you shape one of Aristotle's hooves and prepare it for re-shoeing, you're contemplating a problem that has been itching at the back of your brain. How to improve the functionality of large barn doors that heretofore have been connected to the barn framework via hinges; hinges that carry the entire load on one end of the door and inevitably suffer gravity's consequences, i.e., the unhinged end of the door sags downward

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over time because of the unbalanced load distribution. The unsupported load end of the door starts dragging along the ground and the door has to be re-hinged or a semicircular “ditch” forms along the swing path of the door. As you hold the horseshoe you’re about to hammer into your Aristotle’s hoof, you have an epiphany!

What if I were to attach a wheel or two to an inverted horseshoe, attach it to the top of the barn door, and run it along a track attached above the door? This would preclude at least three problems; the load of the door would be carried equally by the wheels/shoes rolling along the track, gone is the swing area needed to open/close the door, and the time dedicated to adjusting the gravity influenced hinges evaporates! Wowser!

If you predicted the two artifacts are used for the purpose of operating doors in this fashion, congratulations! One of the artifacts that was pulled out of an archaeological dig by Mr. Charles Cowling is an early example of the horseshoe door trolley and the other, newer model, is currently being used around the world. You may have noticed that many houses now use this system as a simpler alternative to pocket doors—saves space, reminds of us of our ancestors ingenuity, and the power of simple machines.

Inquiring minds that actually made predictions concerning this artifact will be in the “Guesses Container” on top of the safe where artifacts are displayed. Future guesses will be displayed on our interactive Facebook page—be looking for it!



Fig. 3: A typical door hanger in use on a local barn door.  
PHOTO: © 2022 “Buck Noble”

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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