The Cutting Edge of Tinware's Past

Tin Snips

Le Ferblantier

Method of Polishing Tinplate in France

By **P. M. CUNNINGHAM**

"The tinner's art is one which finally claims a legitimate work of a Manual Collection, for this art, of which the products are so ordinary, so numerous, has never been decently treated. The 'Encyclopédie Méthodique could not speak but of the primary fabricating procedure; all the improvements obtained since have inevitably been left off. The Dictionnaire de Technologie, in reproducing in part these procedures, adds the remainder of the tinner's trade, that of the lampmaker, so perfected of our days."

This comes from the preface of M. LeBrun's work, The Manual of Tinners and Lampmakers, published in 1830 in Paris. M. LeBrun wrote at least two manuals using earlier works like M. Didérot and M. Alembert's The Encyclopedia Published in 1763 in France as a model for creation but expanded the detail. The Manual of Tinners and Lampmakers has nearly 300 pages of text plus four pages of engravings covering all aspects of the trade. In comparison, Didérot's work covered a variety of trades to a limited extent. His work contains only two engraved plates of tin work and very brief descriptions. By comparing M. LeBrun's work to M. Didérot's work, the details of 18th century tin work in France can be interpreted by the tools and procedures it shares with the 19th century descriptions. This interpretation may also apply to tin work in the United States during this same time period. This article will examine one small aspect of tin work described in these books that little is known about today: the preliminary polishing of tinplate.

The Manual starts with eight sections describing the tools employed in the trade. The Encyclopedia names and illustrates these tools, but does not go into any detailed description. For that reason, the following is all quoted from the Manual; only those relevant illustrations of the Encyclopedia are referred to in parentheses. Keep in mind that these are translations, and we chose to stay as close to the original as possible. Therefore the terminology and vocabulary may be somewhat foreign.

"Tools to polish. The first division includes:

•Continued on page 2

Reflections in the Plate

Apologies & Encouragement

Whoops! As many of you realize there was some problems with the shipping of the last issue. It seems the postal service took a liking to our little publication and would not part with the whole issue when it came to delivery. Many readers only received portions of the last issue. I believe everyone should have received a complete issue by this point. If you did not get a complete issue please contact me and I will get one off immediately. Thank you for your patience in this matter.

I have been hearing of interest from some of you in the possibility of writing articles for ***Tin Snips***. I would like to encourage all of you interested in pursuing this endeavor. Length is unimportant and I will gladly provide any assistance that you may want, from simple editing to subject development. It is the goal of ***Tin Snips*** to provide a variety of information on tin work and articles from the readership is a step towards that goal.

-P. M. Cunningham

Polishing Tinplate: continued from front page

1) The straightening hand anvil (fig. 1); this instrument, in tempered steel, perfectly polished, four inches square. One sees in *a* this part, and in *b* the foot which enters a large mortise frequented in the bench of the tinner, or in the 'billot'." {This anvil is the same tool shown in the lower left hand corner of the Encyclopedia shop plate on page 1, and figure 4 below.}

"2) The hammer with two sides, or with two planishing heads, also in steel, tempered and well polished (fig. 2). It is six to eight inches long, round on two sides, and with a circumference of about an inch and a half. It serves at once to planish and to straighten; also one designates it under that double title of its operations, which, moreover, have nearly the same purpose." {Fig 11 in the Encyclopedia.}

" 3) The 'billot.' It is a large cylinder of wood, three feet high and three feet in circumference. The two faces of the top and bottom are equally smooth; but the first is pierced with several cavities round or square, which serve to receive hand anvils and 'bigornes'." {This can be seen being used by various tradesmen in the front page illustration.}

"4) The planishing hand-anvil. It resembles the straightening hand-anvil; also we excuse ourselves from showing its figure: it is a square piece of iron, of which the top surface is very uniform and perfectly polished; the bottom face, having the form of a stem, enters into the billot.

"5) The wooden mallet (fig. 3) with rounded sides. The tinner often prefers this wooden hammer over iron hammers, because it produces less variations over the work." {Fig. 8 of the Encyclopedia.}

This finishes the section describing the tools used in polishing tin. In the second chapter the Manual goes on to describe the method by which the polishing is done.

"Manner of polishing tin. As soon as he has made his purchases of tin, the maker puts the cases under cover from all humidity: at the same time he distinguishes, by some apparent mark, the tinplate which, less advantageous, will be used unpolished, that is to say as it arrives from the manufacturer. The iron of best quality is destined to receive the polishing which will give it the luster of gold: but, for the ordinary, one does not prepare the tin except after tracing and cutting the pieces one will use. This delay is to avoid polishing metals which will later be scrap, and avoid the hindrance that a sheet of a large length makes on the hand-anvils. However, when the pieces are little like the bands around certain coffeepot filters, to form handles on small cylinders, it is better to start by polishing the sheet in which one will cut them altogether, in economizing the matter as much as possible.

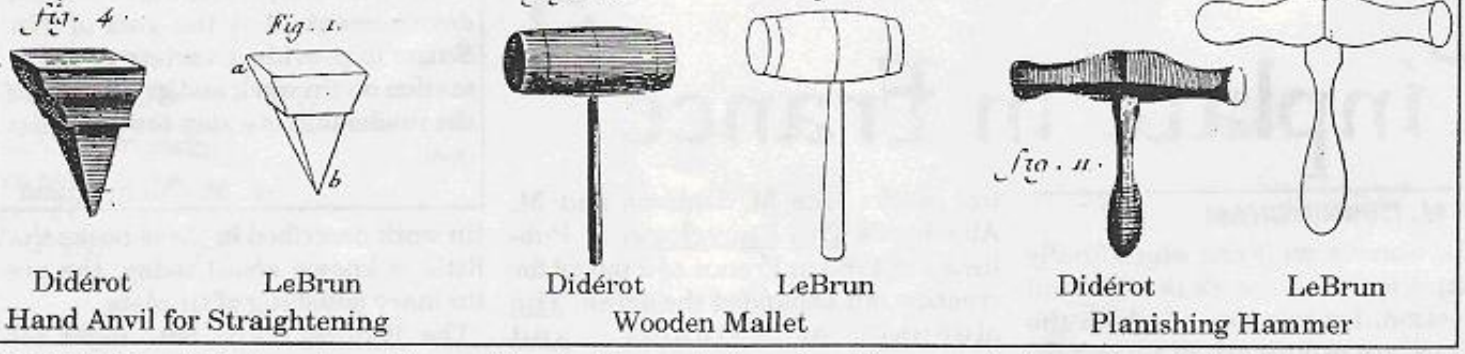
"To polish the tin, the worker puts each sheet or each piece on the straightening stake; he holds it there or turns it with his left hand, and with the right hand, armed with the dressing mallet, he hits the piece of tin, which polishes perfectly and takes the luster of gold: he often uses his mallet for this effect. One can not furnish many details on the manner of polishing; one feels that this depends on the skill of the worker to give the hammer strikes perpendicularly, to not hit it too many times, to avoid producing inequalities on the surface of the tin: some little practice will soon completely succeed."

Although roughly 65 years separate these two works, the presence in both texts of virtually identical tools used to perform this operation seem to indicate that the process was the same in France in 1763 as it was in 1830. If this was a standard practice of tin work in France during this time, the question comes up as to whether this process may have been used in the United States. Although I know of no accounts describing this process, there is evidence indicating the presence of planished or polished tinware being made in the United States according to the *List of Prices of Master Tin Plate Workers of Philadelphia* printed in 1835. This list mentions several styles of coffeepots that are sold as planished wares.

The another question that comes up is what exactly polished tinware looked like. I am unsure of any examples of artifacts matching the description of this process, a product with a finish the "luster of gold." Whether this process can be reproduced using LeBrun's directions and modern tinplate, either electroplated or hot dipped, is unknown. This question may only be answerable by persons like ourselves, dedicated to forgotten technology. If anyone has luck in this endeavor, please share your results!

Thanks to Greta Cunningham and Walter Fleming's friends for helping with these translations.

POLISHING TOOLS



Didérot LeBrun — Hand Anvil for Straightening

Didérot LeBrun — Wooden Mallet

Didérot LeBrun — Planishing Hammer

The Research Library

Recollections of a New England Town,

By "Faith" (Mrs. Frances A. Breckenridge),

Meriden, Conn.: The Journal Publishing Company, 1899. **pp 197-199.**

Chapter XXXII

MANUFACTURE OF TINWARE

Chief among the old industries of Meriden was the Manufacture of tinware. "Uncle" Sam Yale had several small shops scattered about on Liberty street and more at Wall and Broad streets. Here also were the extensive barns belonging to his farm.

Esquire William Yale had a large shop at 465 Broad street (where Mrs. Frank Foster's house stands); Edwin Yale had large shops on South Charles street; Goodrich & Rutty did a large business on South Broad street, below Ann. One of the largest and oldest of all was that of Esquire Noah Pomeroy, "over east." Nearly, if not quite as large and as old, was that of Esquire Patrick Clark at Clarksville, on North Colony street. In 1840, this was moved to the corner and - for that period - a large two-story building took the place of the numerous small shops on the old site. Some years later it became the meriden Savings Bank, Edwin Curtis, President. Later still it went through another transformation. The building was cut into two; part of it is on Veteran street.

The working force of the tinware trade were journeymen and apprentices. The latter had a goods deal to learn before they could attain to the dignity of the former. The making of tinware, is now a lost art. Fifteen separate processes were thought necessary before even a pint basin was ready for the market. Each article was in several parts, carefully proportioned, and cut out from patterns by the great shears. Nobody dreamed then of making all sorts of tin things by simply dropping a great lump of iron onto a sheet of tin - and a thin one at that. This was brought from Albany to New Haven by the old sloop "Tantivy." From New Haven it was brought to Meriden by Joseph Hough, who did a regular carrier's trade for a great many years between the two places. Mr. Bull says that in the thirties a storm of eighteen days' duration prevented the sloop from coming into the harbor, and for a few days Hough made money by bringing up flour from New Haven and getting fourteen dollars per barrel for it in Meriden. His harvest was a short one.

The young men employed in the various tin shops made a large contingent in the younger population of the town. It was remarked when, on one occasion, the men's gallery at the Baptist church was unusually well filled, that every man or boy there was in the tin business in some capacity. The apprentices were from respectable, often well-to-do families. They were boarded either in the family of the principal or in some other where they would be carefully looked after.

There were not so many temptations for the misleading of the youth as there are now. The young men were, most of them, well principled and of moral rectitude. All were intelligent and as well educated as any men out of the professions. They were freely admitted into the best society of the town and welcomed in the church choirs. One John Phelps had a tenor voice so esteemed that the Baptist church paid him a dollar on Sunday - not fifty-two dollars per year - bargaining was closely done in those days. A little bit of Meriden romance is connected with his name. He was a general favorite, but had made himself particularly agreeable to an eccentric maiden lady old enough to be his mother. After he left town she followed him, and sought for him in vain. Sometimes she found, or fancied she did, some trace of him. She spent much time and money in her search, during which she traversed nearly the whole of the State of New York. After a number of months thus spent she came back, by that time known to be insane, as she probably was when she left home. She remained quietly and happily interested in her own fancies until her death at an advanced age .

After leaving town John Phelps was never again heard from by any one here.

Specimens of japanned and gilded tinware made here seventy years ago may still be see. A spice box, given by Edwin Curtis to his wife as a Christmas present, made especially to his order for the purpose, is in use still. There seems no reason why it should not last for another hundred years.

From about 1840 the value of the local tinware business declined. Of the old shops, once so numerous and so full of life and activity, not a building now remains. Fifty years ago, in proportion to the population, the trade was as important to the interests of the town as any of the large enterprises are now to the city.

Courtesy of Saundra Ross Altman.

Tin Snips

c/o P.M. Cunningham
402 East. Main St.
Madison, IN 47250
(812) 273-4193

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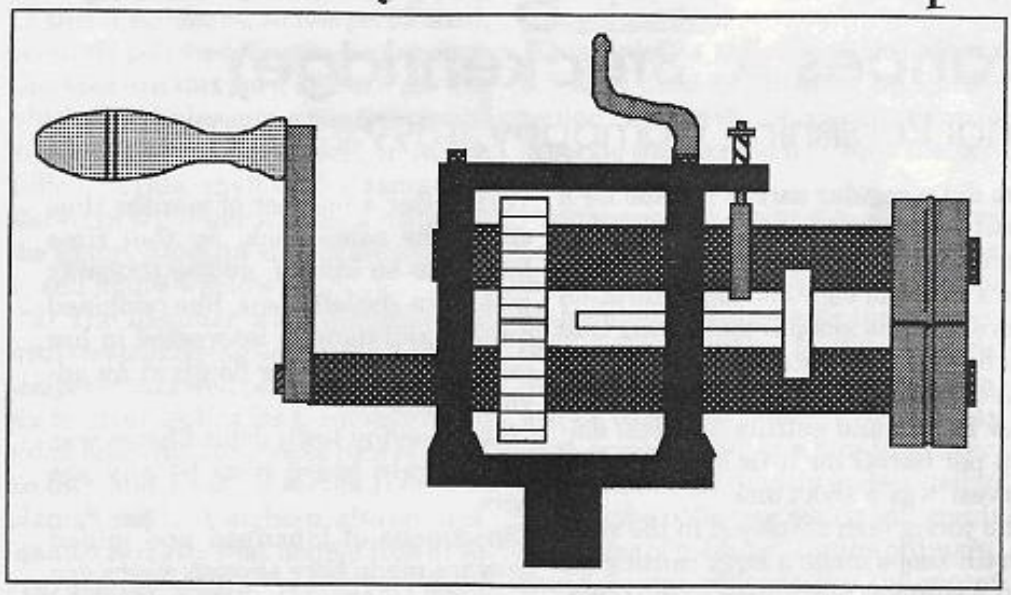
Subscriptions are $15 per year for six bimonthly issues. Back issues are $2.50 each. Send checks or money orders to the address above.

This newsletter exists for ***you,*** so do not forget to send your submissions to the same address.

Snipets
News from you and other scraps



P. M. Cunningham
Madison, IN

Recently this letter was received from one of my customers as a thank you and a reminder of the importance of making items water tight.

"The (mess) kettles are wonderful ...

They are also pretty handy fire extinguishers. I don't know if you heard but at the muster (at Fort Osage) a piece of wadding blew up under the shingles in the Block House and started a small fire. I grabbed what I had and hauled your small kettle filled with coffee up inside the block house. My coffee and your kettle did the job but I took a little rubbing about the quality of my coffee and what its capabilities were. Your kettle did a fine job protecting our national heritage.

David M. Hinckly"

Other Articles

"Unpainted Tinware" by Margret Coffin. **Early American Life**; Volume XXVI, Number 1, February 1995. A six page article on the general history of plain tinware, tinsmith's ornamentation, kitchenware & lighting devices, anniversary gifts, and trinkets, banks & toys. Also contains five pages of photographs of original artifacts, from Margret Coffin's personal collection.

From Dale the Tinker
St. Albans, WV

Above is a drawing of a machine that Dale owns. The body measures 4" w. x 6.25" h. x 5.5" l. , the shafts extend out an additional 5" from the body and are 1.25" in diameter. There are no markings anywhere on the machine to indicate the maker. The wheels are newly manufactured. Dale is looking for information on the maker and/or the top shaft lifter mechanism.

The lifter mechanism appears to be similar to that seen on some extremely large beading machines the editor has seen. It also matches a" S. Stow-M. Foss Plantsville Ct." made beading machine at the Early American Trade Museum in Madison, IN. However the body style does not match any of these machines (possibly an earlier version).

Send any additional information you may have to Dale.

Jeff Goris
Wabash, IN

"At an antique show, I purchased a tin pint mug of heavy construction. It measures 3.5" in diameter and 4.8125" high. It is stamped PINT on the side. Near the rim is a blob of solder. Upon close examination, a crest is stamped into this blob (see drawing to right). It looks like English. Does anyone have information about this mug or the crest?"

Jeff Goris
Wabash, IN

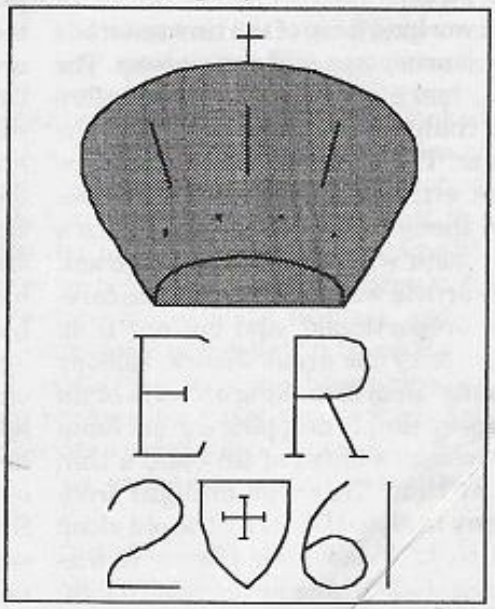
(Editor's note: This piece came in to late to combine with last month's article so it will be published in full now.)

SIGN YOUR WORK

"I recently visited an antique mall looking for original tinware to add to my collection. One dealer had a well used "Civil War cup, as is for $20.00". I could tell that it was a veteran of many reenactment battles and wasn't original. I don't know if the dealer knew it was a reproduction or if he was fooled too. This isn't the first time I have seen modern tinware advertised as original. We must remember that many antique dealers and most of the public really can't tell the difference.

Occasionally, while demonstrating at a historical reenactment someone will stick a piece of tinware in my face and want me to copy it. Usually, it is not signed. I can identify some pieces by the style and quality of the work. I will then tell the person who he must contact for a copy or contact the maker myself for permission to copy. The other work that is un-signed and un-attributable is in a "gray area" for me. Most pieces I politely refuse to duplicate. Some others, I copy the idea but change it enough to make it mine.

For the above reasons, I strongly suggest that you sign and date your work. Name stamps are available from several sources. Mine came from the Victor Stamp Company."



MARKETPLACE

Suppliers

•Nature's Own Charcoal
Costa Fruit & Produce
414 Rutherford Ave
Charleston, MA 02129
(800) 289-7629 ask for Dave Santos
(800) 322-1375 for mail orders

Manufacturers of charcoal made from pure virgin hardwood used primarily for restaurant cooking. Charcoal is made out of pure virgin hardwood, no bark or old lumber, which comes from Northern Quebec Hardwood Maple forests, a denser wood than grown in the United States. No trees are expressly cut down for charcoal, instead only parts not suitable for lumber are used. Product contains reduced sulphur content from 50 to 250 times of most commercial brands of briquets. Will also burn 17% hotter and 19% longer than composition briquets. 5% of gross profits goes into urban green belt development. Both lump and briquets products are available.

•Liberty Paint Corporation
Rt 66 and Rt 238
Hudson, NY 12534
(518) 828-4060

Suppliers of japanning and artist's supplies. Carry asphaltum made using old formulas and containing no varnish, driers or xylol and can be either air dried or baked. Also carry a range of japan colors which are made from shellac, linseed oil, solvent, and japan driers. In addition, they carry bronzing supplies, gilding materials, graining tools, stencil tools and varnishes.

Auctions

January 28, 1995
Tappany's Tin Shop
307 S. Lime St.
Lancaster, PA

Large quantity of sheet metal equipment including 31 different rotary machines, 60 stakes, a 24" throat foot punch press, shears, brakes, bar folders, and hand tools. For more information contact Bechtold Auctioneers, 1928 Creek Hill Rd., Lancaster, PA 17601, (717) 397-9240.

Workshops

Old Sturbridge Village
1 Old Sturbridge Village Road
Sturbridge, MA 01566
(508) 347-33362

Tinsmithing II: Lantern
February 12, March 12
Students will learn the techniques involved in making a pierced tin lantern and manufacture one to take home.

Tinsmithing II: Independent
February 26
A class designed for advanced students. Participants will be able to make a project of their choosing with the direction of the workshop leader.

Tinsmithing II: Coffee Pot
March 11
Students will learn the techniques involved in making a one quart coffee pot and manufacture one to take home.

Tinware; Hearth and Apple Pie
March 26
Unique workshop in which students will make an apple corer and nutmeg grater and then use those items to make an apple pie.

Historic Knight Foundry
P. O. Box 158
Sutter Creek, CA 95685
(209) 267-5543

Industrial Living History Workshops
March 10-12, June 2-4, October 6-8
Learn the foundry, machine shop, blacksmithing and pattern making skills of the late 1800s.

New Subscribers

•Charles Baker

Hope, IN 47246

•Bob Betz
Tin and Brass Works

Mumford, N 14511

•James Hastings

Troy, OH 45373

•Robin Hood
Robin Hood Tinware

Rockbridge, OH 45342

Wanted

Looking for any and all information on hot dipped tin plating in the 19th century. Need the primary and secondary research material to manufacture reproduction 19th century tin plate.
Patrick Cunningham
402 East Main Street
Madison, IN 47250

Documentation for usage of copper bottoming of tinware , such as coffee pots and teapots, prior to the mid-19th century. Please send any information to;
Jeff Goris
3582 West, 50 North
Wabash, IN 46992

Small size brake about 24" long capable of bending 14 gauge steel for manufacturing braziers.
R. Wolfe
Bethel Forge
10945 St. Rd. 227N
Fountain City, IN 47341

Looking for sources of tinplate. If you have any supplier names for dealers in the southeast, please send addresses and phone numbers.
Clifford Sanders
Sanders Roofing and Sheet Metal Inc.
150 Taylor St.
Ocoee, FL 32761

Tools for Sale

Brass top wiring machine employing the old Raymond patent rocker assembly. Marked 'NIAGRA STAMPING & TOOL CO., BUFFALO, N. Y. Price $75 plus shipping
P. M. Cunningham
402 East Main St.
Madison , IN 47250

•William Klein

Fairfield, NJ 07004

•Jack Smith
Smith Enterprises

York, PA 17404

•Kent Vincent

Chatham, IL 62629

The Drafting Table

CAD for Pattern Making

By **Jeff Goris**

I teach CAD Drafting at Wabash High School. The program that we use is AUTOCAD Release 11 and is published by Autodesk. It requires an IBM compatible computer with a 386 chip and a math coprocessor. The advantages of CAD over conventional drafting are accuracy, speed and ease of editing.

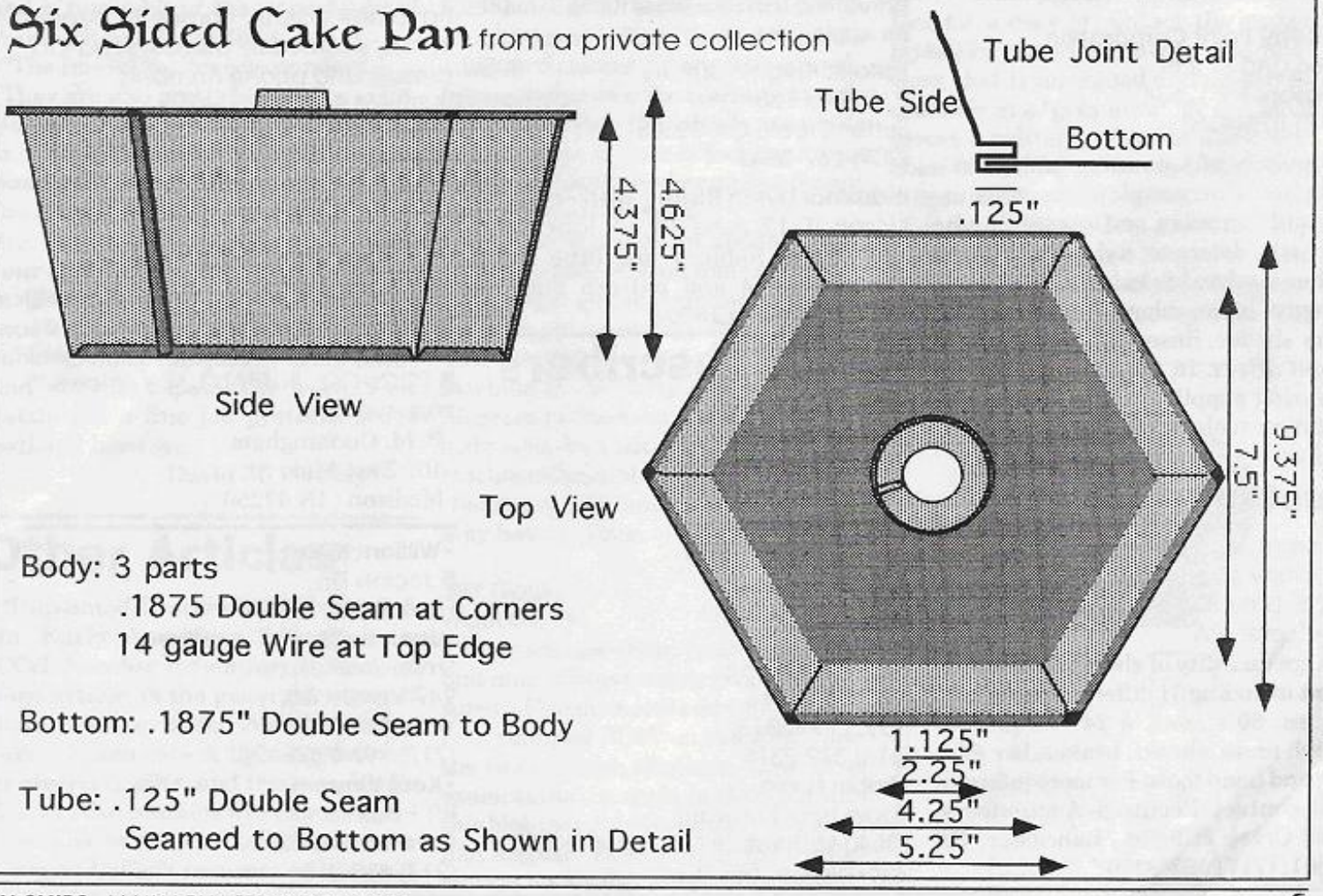
When discussing sheet metal pattern drafting with other tinsmiths, I am often asked about CAD. I use CAD to a limited extent in developing patterns. One of the biggest helps has been when doing radial-line development such as tapered mugs and wash tubs. By making the drawing on CAD and using the dimensioning features, I am given distances and angles with great accuracy. I use these measurements to set my dividers and complete the layout manually. Another use of CAD is when I must divide a circle into a number of segments prior to fluting. I draw the circle, tell the computer how many segments and print it out. No more trial and error with dividers! A third use for CAD is in developing designs for punching and stippling. A small part of the design can be copied, rotated or mirrored to produce the full pattern. The pattern can be scaled up or down as needed.

Now for the disadvantages: COST, COST, COST! The computer hardware will cost around $1000 and the CAD program can cost anywhere from $200 - $2000 depending on the level of complexity and where you buy it. The School's programs cost about $1800 each. These programs are copyrighted and therefore illegal to copy.

Most users of personal computers use a printer to type documents. That is fine for text, but does not have the accuracy required for layout work. For example, a printer will not create a perfectly round circle unless that printer is accurately calibrated. A plotter is used instead of a printer for CAD drafting. Plotters start around $800 for a small one capable of using 12" x 18" paper. I have not used a laser printer, so I can't comment on its use.

If you have CAD already and want to use it, great! If you are just interested in CAD for pattern development, then I would recommend against spending that kind of money. Those of you who want to play around with CAD may wish to sign-up for adult evening classes offered through vocational schools and community colleges.

Six Sided Cake Pan from a private collection



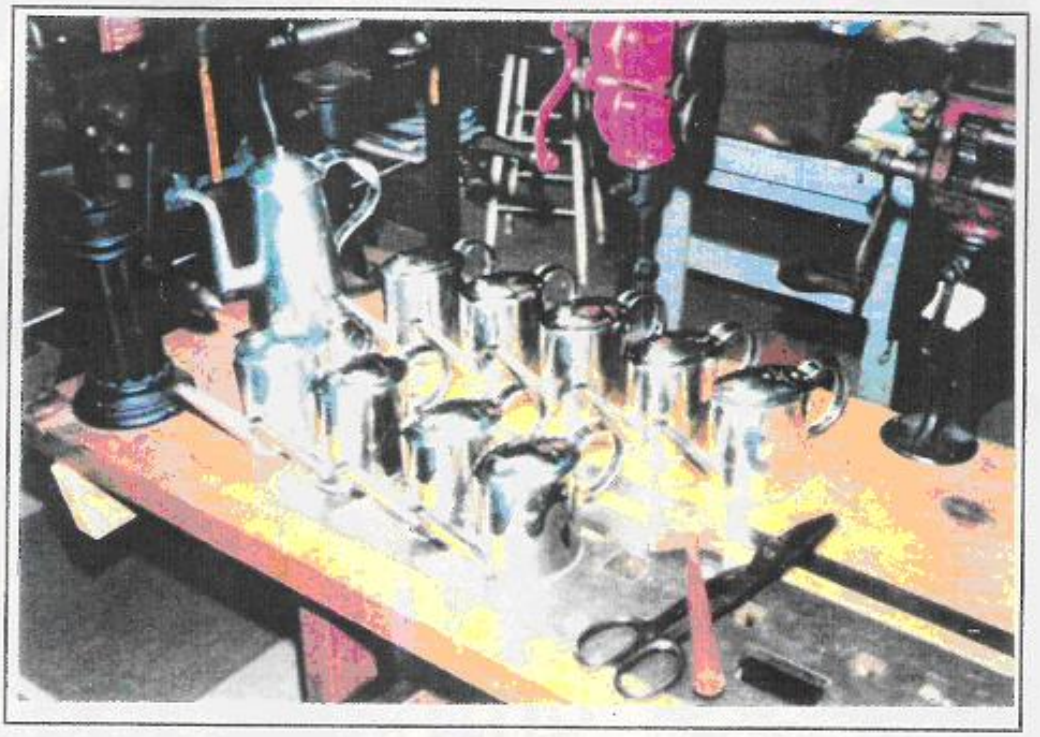
Body: 3 parts
.1875 Double Seam at Corners
14 gauge Wire at Top Edge

Bottom: .1875" Double Seam to Body

Tube: .125" Double Seam
Seamed to Bottom as Shown in Detail

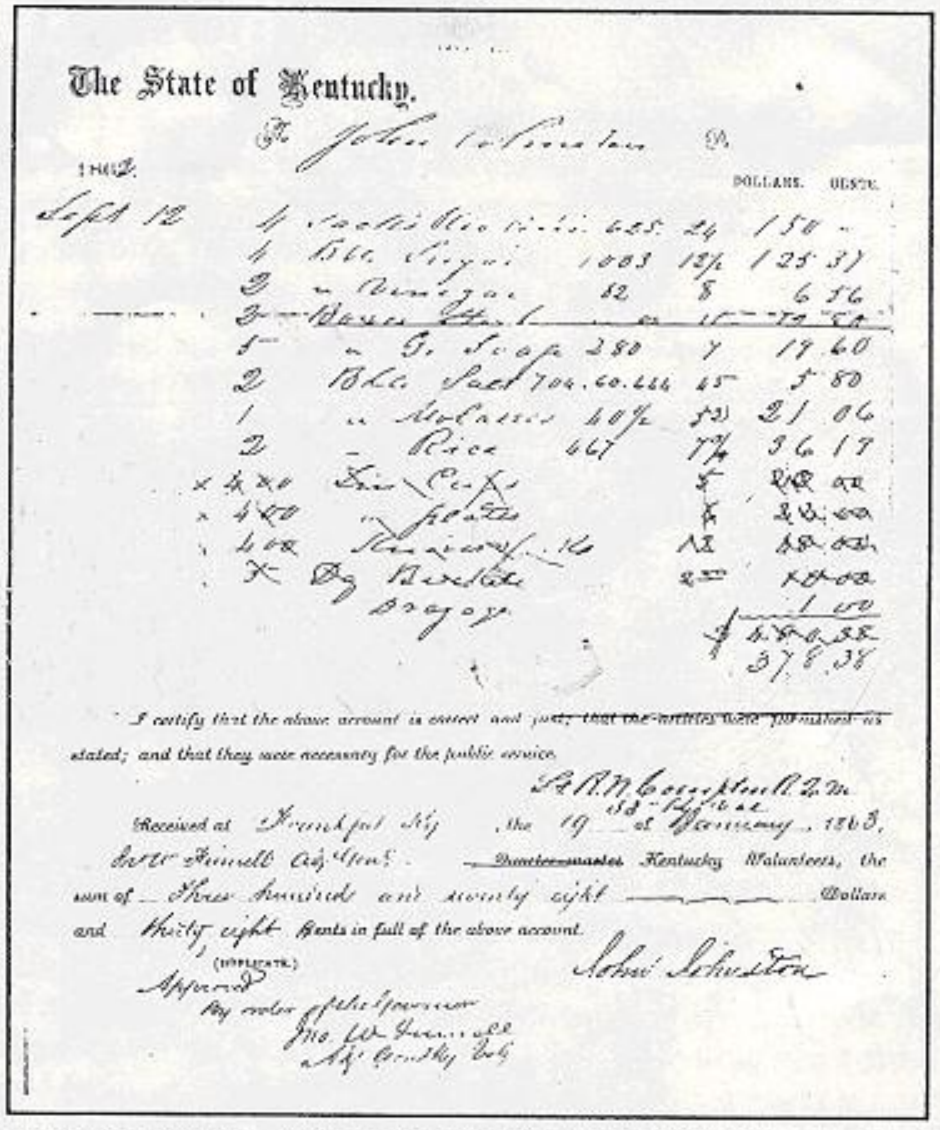
Spotlight on the Past

Tin Snips requests photos of our subscribers' work for publication. Please send descriptions of the items pictured along with your photos. ***Tin Snips*** asks that subscribers use this section for education, appreciation, and inspiration. Although many tin artifacts were originally mass produced, we ask that our subscribers respect their colleagues' work by going to the effort of finding their own artifacts to reproduce. We would like to create an atmosphere of sharing, where manufacturers will not have to worry about losing their product line to their peers, and we can all contribute to expanding the knowledge of our trade.



Crook Neck Coffee Pot and Teapots
Reproduction by
Walter Fleming,
Ballston Lake, NY
Originals from
Bill McMillen,
Richmondtown Restoration

Pierced Tin Lantern
Reproduced by
Jeff Goris
Wabash, IN
Original from
personal collection



The State of Kentucky.

To John Johnston Dr.

1862. DOLLARS. CENTS.

Sept 12 4 Roots Rio [illegible] 625. 24 150
4 Tea Congou 1003 12½ 125 37
2 " Oolong 82 8 6 56
2 Hyson Extra " 12 50 25 00
1 " G. Scap 280 7 19 60
2 Blk Leaf 704. 60. 644 45 5 80
1 " Molasses 40½ 52 21 06
2 " Rice 467 7¾ 36 17
x 4 x 0 Tin Cups 5 2 00
x 4 00 " Pails 8 2 00
1 Box Tumblers 12 1 80
x Dz Buckets 2 50 x 0 00
Drayage 1 50
$ 470 38
376 38

I certify that the above account is correct and just; that the articles were furnished as stated; and that they were necessary for the public service.

R. M. Gaughan Lt Col
33d Regt Ky Vol

Received at Frankfort Ky the 19 day of January, 1863,
of Lieut Finnell Asst Quart Master Kentucky Volunteers, the
sum of Three hundred and seventy eight Dollars
and thirty eight Cents in full of the above account.

(DUPLICATE.)

John Johnston

Approved
By order of the Governor
Jno W Finnell
Asst Quartermaster Ky Vols

Receipt of payment to John Johnston from the 33rd Kentucky Volunteer Infantry from Kentucky Military Museum

INSIDE