The Cutting Edge of Tinware's Past

Tin Snips

March/April 1995 Volume 5 Number 2

Reflections in the Plate

The sixth issue

Well, this is the sixth issue of the new incarnation of *Tin Snips* and that means for many of you that your subscription runs out as of this issue. If that is the case you will notice a check mark in the square on the back page of this issue. You will need to get your checks off for renewal within the next six weeks to keep *Tin Snips* coming to you on a regular basis.

As long as you have the envelope already addressed, take the time, if you can, to send along any comments you might have on what you have seen in the past issues, what you would like to see in future issues, and any other bits of information that others may like to know. I am always looking for things to include from full articles, to shop tricks, to names of suppliers, or simply photos of your own work.

For those of you who feel that the newsletter is not meeting your needs and are considering not renewing your subscription don't just fall off the roster. Please take the time to let me know why you are not renewing your subscription so that I can try to improve the publication to fit the needs of its readers.

-P. M. Cunningham

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

Subscriptions, submissions & back issues:

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.

Vocabulary

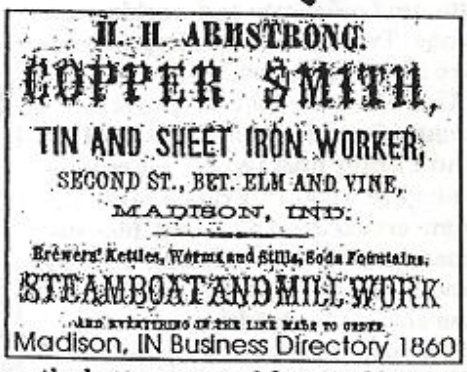
Tinker, Tinman, Peddler... Why?

by Phil Eckert

The terms used to describe workers engaged in various aspects of the tinplate industry, although often used interchangeably, have very specific meanings, which can change over time and place. Thoughtful usage of these terms will make our communications more exact.

"Tinner" is the most common name for a tradesman fabricating tinware in America prior to 1850. This term appears consistently in deeds, probate inventories, censuses and advertisements. *"Tinman"* is also commonly used in this country. However, in Great Britain the title tinman also refers to a tin miner. More formally, a man can refer to himself as a *"Tinplate Worker"*, or as one who has *"gone to work at the tin trade"*. The 1850 U. S. Census lists more than a dozen names for men working at the trade. This census seems to be the earliest use of the title *"Tinsmiths"*, a term which becomes more common in the later 19th century, and continues in common usage today. *"Tinsmith"*, however has not completely replaced the older terms, even in modern hardware store flyers; "tinners' shears" are still advertised at True Value.

The above terms describe the mechanics who make the tinware. There is also some other terms associated with the tin trade. A *"Tinker"* is an itinerant repairer and, by 19th century accounts,


H. H. ARMSTRONG.
COPPER SMITH,
TIN AND SHEET IRON WORKER,
SECOND ST., BET. ELM AND VINE,
MADISON, IND.
Brewers' Kettles, Worms and Stills, Soda Fountains,
STEAMBOAT AND MILL WORK
AND EVERYTHING OF THE LIKE MADE TO ORDER.
Madison, IN Business Directory 1860

on the bottom rung of the social ladder. Once again , the usage is different in Britain, where a tinker can also be an itinerant manufacturer. A *"Peddler"* is a traveling salesman. Peddlers often specialized: there were clock peddlers, essence peddlers and silk peddlers, as well as tin peddlers. The late 18th and early 19th tin peddlers were often employed by the tinware manufacturer and were, in effect, "manufacturers' reps". Generally, peddlers did not repair or make tinware. They sold it.

Other workers who were closely associated with tinware production were *"Japanners"* and *"Decorators"* who painted finished tinware to produce Japanware. This branch of the trade employed both males and females, unlike the other branches which employed only men.

So please, don't call me a tinker...

Philip Eckert is an Interpreter Program Supervisor at Old Sturbridge Village, an outdoor living history museum in Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

The Research Library

A Study of Two Soldering Firepot Airflows from the 19th Century

By P. M. Cunningham

When one considers technological developments in the tin industry, the first thing that comes to mind are various inventions and improvements to mechanical machinery. Research shows that the ingenuity of the time was not limited to mechanical improvements. Many improvements were centered on the redesign of common shop fixtures, such as the firepot, both for considerations of efficiency and working conditions. Two such design improvements are described below.

The first firepot improvement comes from LeBrun's **Manual of the Tinner and Lampmaker** published in 1830 in France. This design created an indirect heating chamber for the soldering coppers and a means by which to ventilate the shop of "unhealthy vapors".

"Furnace to heat soldering irons. The body of this instrument is in strong tole (sheet metal), and supplied with a grate like ordinary ones; but in place of putting the irons immediately in contact with the fire, and to expose them to the combined action of the heat and the oxygen, that which obliges one to smooth them continually to remove oxidized particles and to renew the surface of the solder, one heats them in a box of tole or cast iron, and in this way, one avoids having to smooth them but once a week. This furnace is in other ways sound and economical; it aerates the workshop, and feeds on coke instead of charcoal.

"Its inventor, Mr. Hobbins, made it clean to aerate in closing the ashpan, and in making the air which feeds the fire pass through a lateral tube which rises to the ceiling, and penetrates the ashpan in making a bend. The *fig.* 48 indicates this disposition: one sees there a flat cover *f* recovering the vertical tube *e*, and which is suspended by a cord passing on two pulleys; the cover is maintained at the desired height by a counterweight *g*; one can therefore regulate at will the access of air in the foyer, and get rid of at the same time unhealthy vapors which gather in the top part of the shop, and which are pulled outside by the draft of the chimney. The author proposes to add to this appliance a tube communicating between the principal tube, and passing across the shop; regulatory valves are destined to admit or exclude air.

"The fuel is introduced by a grooved door, *a*, and, in leaving this half-open, one can slow the air current to the point to maintain only combustion, so that the fire doesn't go out during the meal hours for workers: *b* is the box of tole or of cast iron in which are placed the tools to heat; it is closed by its base and rests on a bar of iron, which passes through the lateral partitions of the furnace; *c* is the grate, *d* the door of the ash pan. The furnace sits on three feet, before permitting placement underneath of a box to receive the ashes, which one cleans from time to time. The furnace is drawn on the scale of one eighth its natural size."

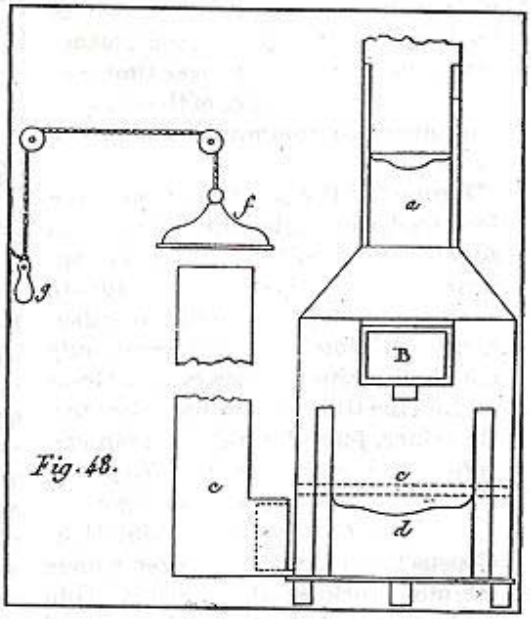


Fig. 48.

The second firepot description comes from United States patent records. The following improvement was patented June 4, 1867 and was designed to regulate the burning in the firepot.

"Be it known that we, C. A. BUTTLES and JAMES COWLES, of Milwaukee, in the County of Milwaukee, and State of Wisconsin, have invented certain new and useful Improvements in Stoves or Fire-Pots for Tinning or Heating Soldering Irons; and we do hereby declare the following to be a full, clear, and exact description of the same, reference being had to the accompanying drawings making a part of this specification, in which--

" Figure 1 represents an elevation of the stove or fire pot.

" Figure 2 represents a vertical section through the same.

" Figure 3 represents a top plan, and

" Figure 4 represents a horizontal section through the stove or fire-pot.

"Similar letters of reference, where they occur in the separate figures, denote like parts in all the drawings.

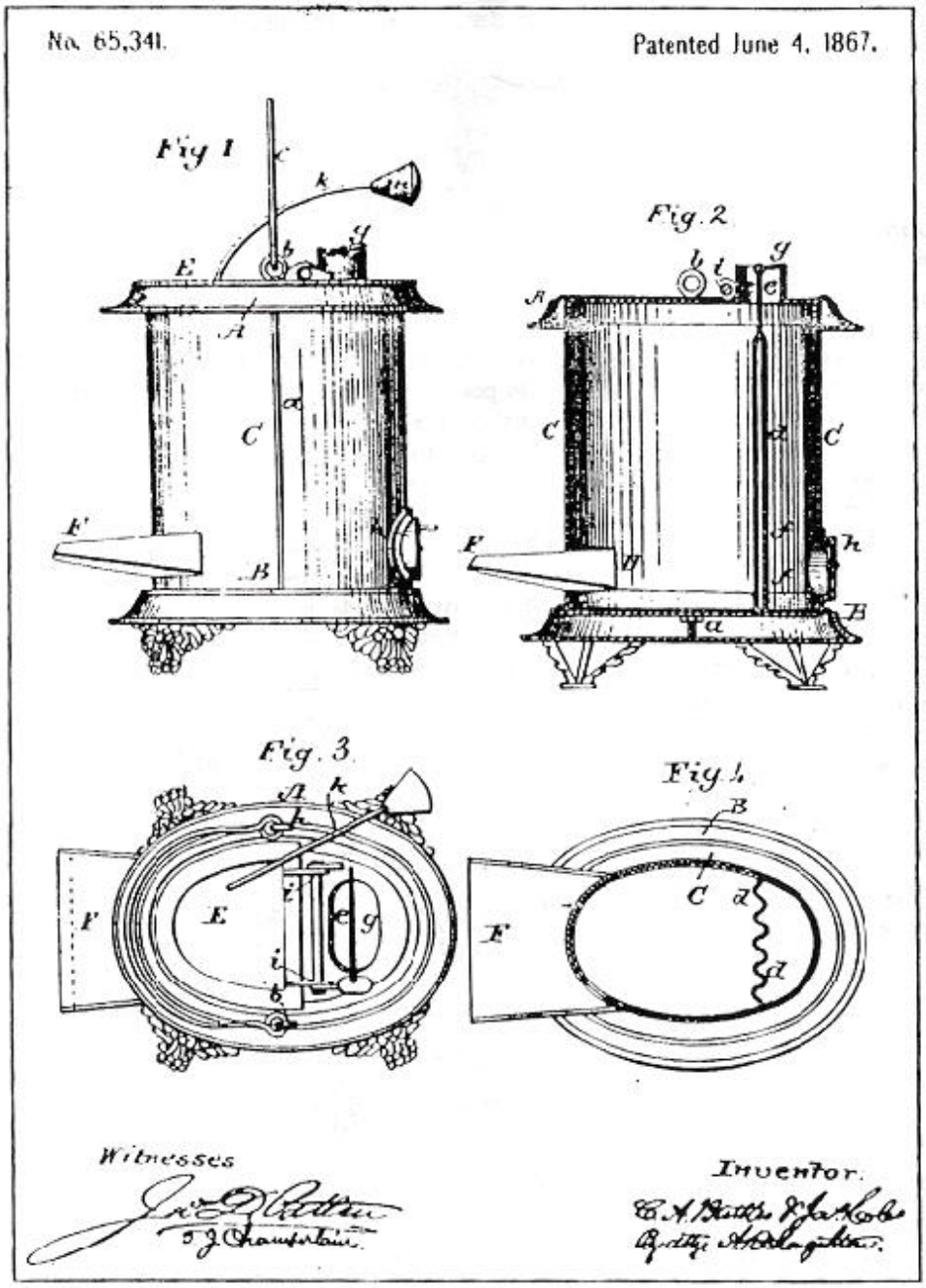
" Our invention consists in certain arrangements by which we can readily increase, diminish, or shut off the draught, and cause the fire to burn downward or upward, and as a consequence greatly economize the consumption of charcoal, as well as to regulate the heat upon the soldering irons.

"The top and bottom plates A B of the stove or fire-pot may be of cast iron, and the body or jacket C of sheet iron, and it may be of an oval form, and the whole held firmly together by screw-rods, *a*, the tops of which may form the dead-eyes *b* into which the bail *c* is hooked for carrying the stove or fire pot

•continued on page 3

Firepots: continued from page 2

from place to place. The mouth or opening D into which the soldering-irons are thrust to be heated is slightly elevated above the bottom plate B, and the hearth F is long enough to support the "iron" whilst it is being heated. In the interior of the stove or fire-pot, and towards the rear of the enclosed space, there is a vertical division or partition, plate *d*, extending from the bottom to the top of the stove, and dividing the pipe collar or exit opening e into two equal parts, or nearly so. This plate *d* we propose to corrugate, so that it may be light and stiff, but more particularly so that it may expand and contract more readily without cracking, as it is subject to varied degrees of heat and coolness. The bottom portion of the plate *d* is furnished with a series of holes, *f*, for a purpose to be hereafter mentioned, and a damper, *g*, is so arranged in the exit flue or pipe collar *e* as that it may close either half of said flue space so as to turn the draught to either side of the division- plate *d*, as circumstances may require. There is also a register, *h*, in the rear of the stove, which communicates with the space or passage in rear of the division plate *d*, for allowing a draught from the external air to pass, without coming through or in contact with the fire in the other division of the interior of the stove or fire-pot. To the lid E, on the top plate, and hinged thereto as at *i*, this lid covering an opening through which the charcoal or other fuel is fed into the stove or fire-pot. To the lid E is united an arm, *k*, that is bent upward and rearward, and has at its extreme end a weight, *m*, which is an overpoise to the lid when it is thrown back, and thus tend to hold it back, but which is an underpoise to the lid when the lid is down, allowing it to remain down. The arm *k*, moreover, serves as a handle for raising or lowering the lid at any time to check draught or feed in fuel.



"When a fire is to be made in this stove or fire-pot, the damper *g* is turned back over the rear half of the exit, as seen in fig. 2, and then, the draught being direct from the mouth D to the exit, the fire will burn freely. The fire having been regularly and freely started the damper maybe turned forward to close the direct draught, and then the air to supply combustion and promote draught must pass down through the coal, thence through the openings *f*, and up behind the partition plate *d*, and out through the exit flue. This downward draught causes the fire to burn downward through the charcoal, and thus create the densest heat where it is most required, viz, where the soldering-irons lie or are placed. When it is necessary to check the fire, but still keep it ignited, the register h is opened, and this supplies a current of air through the space in the rear of the partition *d*, without its coming through the fire-chamber, and of course checks all drought through the fire-chamber, and so long as the register *h remains* open the fire will smolder away, but still keep ignited, and the moment the register is closed it will immediately brighten up again. And in such a stove or fire-pot very fine charcoal can be burned advantageously, even to the coal-dust, which cannot be used in ordinary soldering-iron heaters."

Snipets
News from you and other scraps

Thomas Latane'
Pepin, WI

*(Editor's note: We are still receiving feedback from the article on **"The Ethics of Reproductions"** printed in Volume 4, Number 5. Please keep it coming and maybe the newsletter can adopt some guidelines on these issues.)*

"I agree that there should be a universal stamp to mark copies (reproductions), though knowing the authenticity of the product copied will still be in question. It could then be assumed that all other products marked as contemporary are adaptations or original designs.

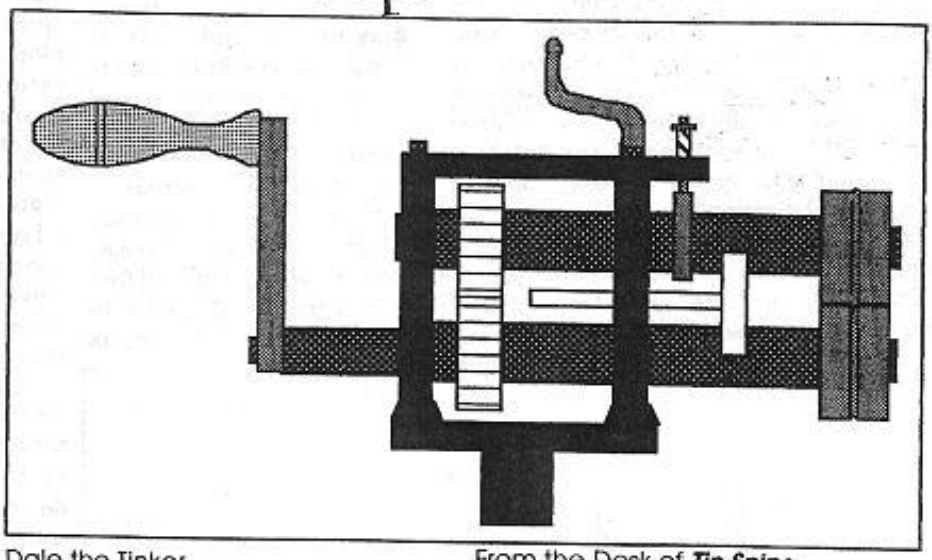
"I've never dated any but my more major projects, but will do so in the future. I've always used my touch mark stamp or stamped my initials with commercial letter stamps which look 20th century.

"Like Jeff Goris in the last issue I have seen articles for sale as antique which I thought were made since 1970. Dates on items would settle many questions."

From the Desk of ***Tin Snips***
Madison, IN

This was to be the issue that featured 18th century tinware. The main article was to be an analysis of construction details of George Washington's mess kit which contains about a dozen pieces of tin. This kit is on exhibit at the Smithsonian's American History Museum.

In working with the National Park Service, I, along with a representative of the park service, were granted access to the kit for documentation and reproduction. It was only upon getting to the museum that we were informed of the form detailing the restrictions to be imposed on us, among them being the return of any documentation of the piece once a reproduction had been made. These restrictions were found to be excessive and were not agreed to by the park service representative or myself. We are still working on getting better access and will hopefully bring you the article and issue at a future date.

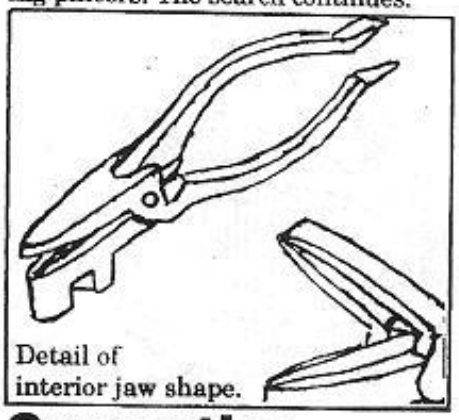


Dale the Tinker
St. Albans, WV

The machine that was pictured last issue (see above) has been identified by Terry Williams of Murfreesboro, TN. Terry has an almost identical machine in his collection. His machine is marked with the name "Roys and Peck". The only differences being that the post mounting system is designed differently, fitted for attachment to a board rather than a universal mount, and the handle is attached by means of a nut rather than being directly screwed onto the shaft.

From the Desk of ***Tin Snips***
Madison, IN

Once more the identification of the tool pictured below is questioned. Jay Ferguson of Louisville, KY had seen the drawing of the tool and questions its possible identification as a pair of lasting pincers. Jay has been making reproduction leather goods for over the last ten years and catalogued the shoe tools at the Lynn Historical Society in Massachusetts. He has never seen either catalogue documentation nor original identified artifacts to support the claim that the tool is a variety of lasting pincers. The search continues.



Detail of
interior jaw shape.

New Subscribers

•Michael Felk

Yadkinville, NC 27055

•Rikki Scott

Victor, MT 59875

•Calvin Struck

Alanson, MI 49706

•Walter Rissmeyer

Lakewood, NJ 08701-6557

Corrections

•Jeff Goris

•Walter Fleming

MARKETPLACE

Suppliers

•W. F. Norman Corporation
214 North Cedar
P. O. Box 323
Nevada, MO 64772-0323
(800) 641-4038
(417) 667 5552

Manufacturers of stamped architectural add decorative sheet metal ornaments, pressed metal ceiling and wall panels, pressed metal siding, and metal roofing shingles. Also do custom stamped and pressed sheet metal reproductions. Available in a variety of different metals. Panels are still formed on antique rope drop hammers, using cast iron and lead dies.

The company prints two catalogues, one of sheet metal ornaments and another of ceiling parts (panels, medallions, and cornices). The ornament catalogue is adapted from an 1892 catalogue published by Miller & Dieing CorporationofBrooklyn, New York. The Ceiling Catalogue is actually a reprint of Norman's 1909 catalogue. Unlike most reprint catalogues this stuff is still for sale.

•Retco
880 Estes Ave.
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
(708) 593-7770
(800) 722-3307

Suppliers of a wide variety of materials and tools, primarily servicing educational institutions' industrial arts classes. Carry both specialized woodworking and metalworking tools along with the basic variety of hand tools. Metal working tools include machining tools, foundry tools, and sheet metal tools. Sheet metal tools range from brakes and forming rolls to hammers, snips and punches. Carry 1/2 pound tinplate both 30 and 28 gauge in sheet size of 20" x 28". Sell in packages of 25 sheets for $66.10 for 30 gauge and $77.75 for 28 gauge. Reportedly Retco just started using a different tin mill supplier. Also carry steel stock, brass and copper sheet, rod and tube stock, and galvanized sheets. Their catalogue is 280 pages. Minimum order is $10 for cash orders, and $25 for charge card orders.

Workshops

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

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
June 2-4, October 6-8

Learn the foundry, machine shop, blacksmithing and pattern making skills of the late 1800s.

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

Madison, IN 47250

Looking for a set of slip rolls. Ideally 12" to 18" in length with 1" diameter rolls.

Stan Baker

Dover, OH 44622-9720

Historic Allaire Village is working on opening a tin shop this spring. Currently they are looking for a copy of *"Practical Workshop Manual"* by Blinn. Contact volunteer interpreter:

Walter Rissmeyer

Lakewood, NJ 08701

Need to find a set of 48" forming rolls to shape four to eight pieces of metal. Can travel five or six hours of home to get work done farther than that other arrangements can be made.

Patrick Cunningham

Madison, IN 47250

Show Dates

Tin Snips prints its readers show dates to allow greater ease for readers to meet each other in person. If you happen to be in the area of these shows stop by and introduce yourselves as a reader of ***Tin Snips***.

Dale the Tinker, of St. Albans, WV, will be setting up shop on the road twice in the month of May.

May 6-7
Manskers Station
Goodlettsville, TN

May 20-21
Conner Praire
Fishers, In

Dawson & Mary Gillaspy, of Oley, PA, will also be on the road twice in the month of May.

May 13 &14
Mercer Museum Folk Festival
Doyleston, PA

May 20 & 21
PA Guild of Craftsman
Spring Craft Celebration
Tyler Street Park
Richboro, PA

Tools for Sale

Niagra burring machine, open case frame. The machine is missing the burring wheels and the fence. Price is $25 plus shipping.

Dale the Tinker

St. Albans, WV 25177

Two reproduced bench plates 8" x 35" made out of unbreakable ductile iron. Cost is $150 each plus shipping.

Bob Leonard

Lexington, OH 44904

Other Articles

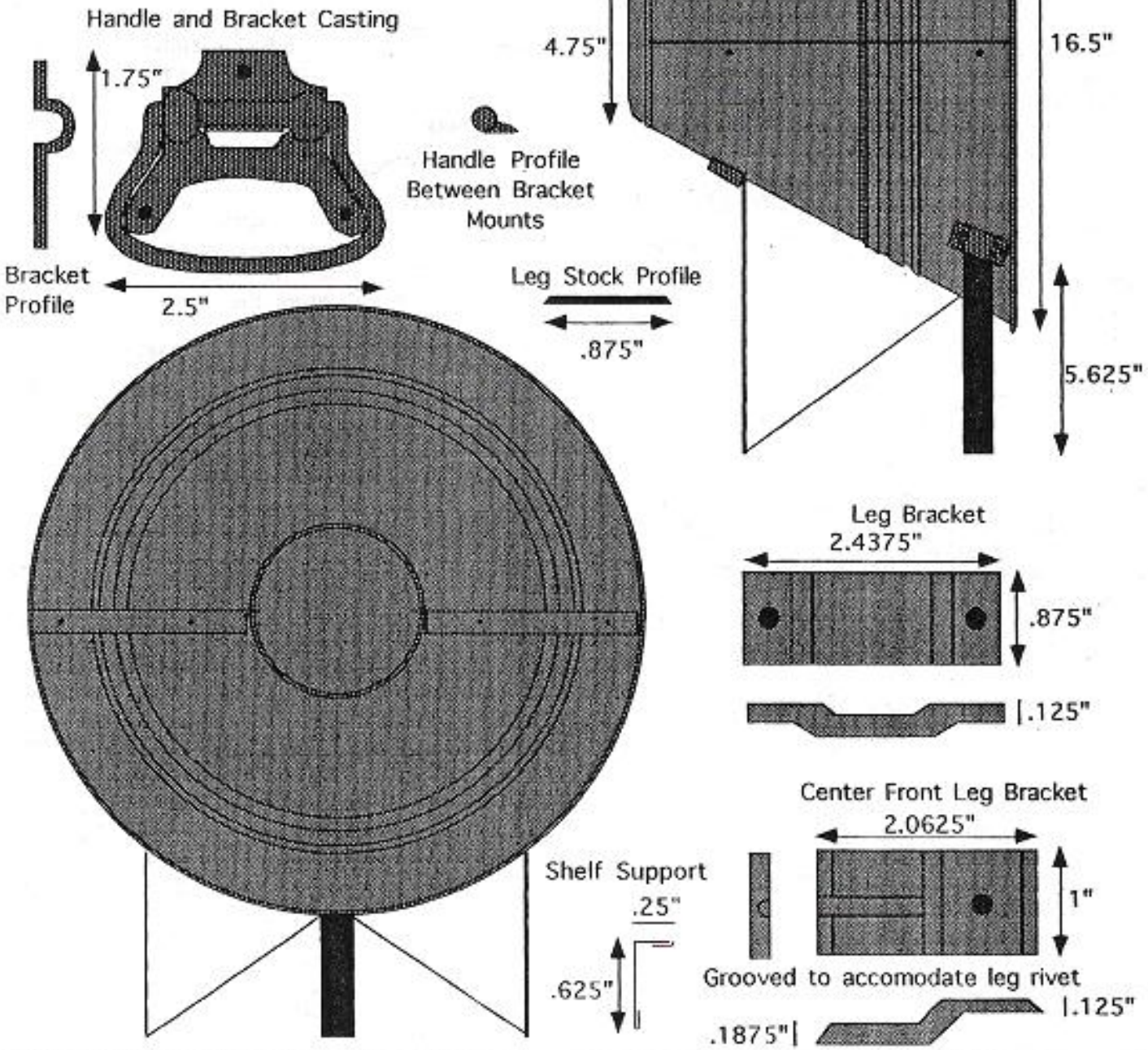
"Humble Treasures from Heartland Tinsmiths" by Laura Collins. **Midwest Living**; Volume 9, Issue 3, June 1995. A small sampling of reproductions of products produced by regional tinsmiths, many of which are readers of **Tin Snips**. The article will feature several photos of various wares. The magazine will be on the newsstands May 1.

The Drafting Table

Reflector Oven

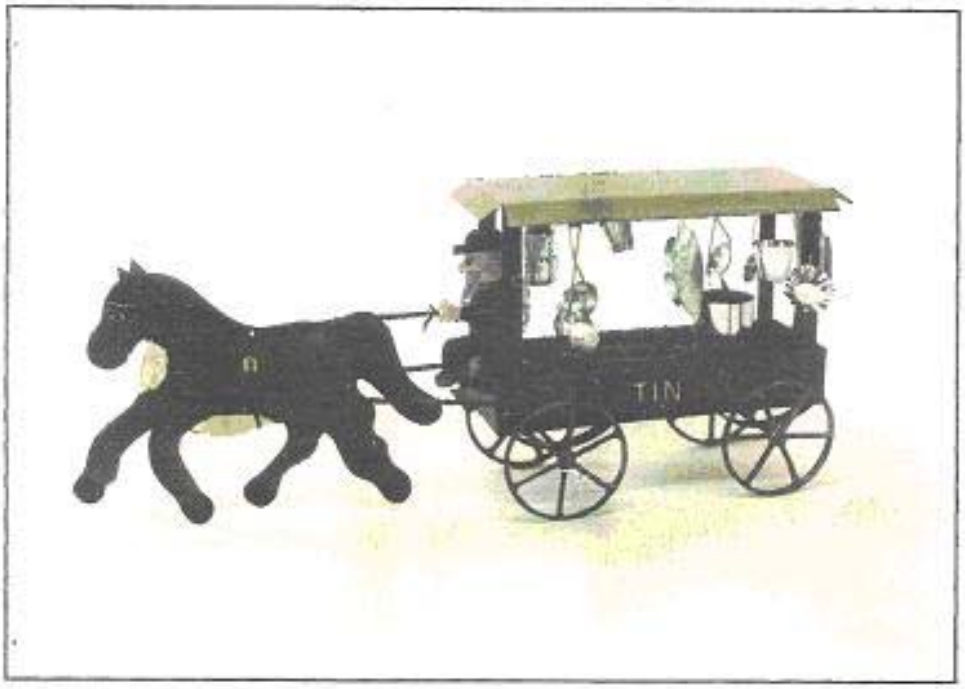
from a private collection

Body: Two pieces
.1875" double seam
12 gauge wired edge
Back: .1875" double seam to body
Shelf Support: .125" hem
Attached with 1 lb tinner's rivits
Legs: Made from steel stock
Center leg rivited to front leg
1.5 lb tinner's rivet
Handle bracket: Attached with 1 lb tinner's rivits
Made from cast iron
Leg Bracket: Attached with 1 lb tinner's rivits
Made from cast iron
Center Leg Bracket: Attached with 2 lb tinner's rivits
Made from cast iron



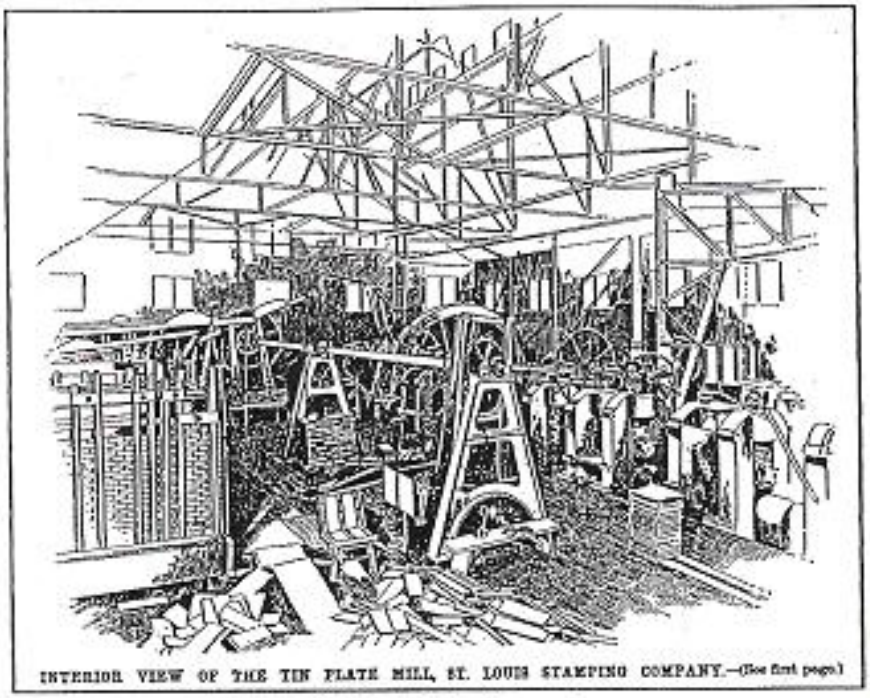
Spotlight on the Past

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.



Tin Peddler's Wagon
Original creation by
Mary & Dawson Gillaspy
Oley, PA

Street Light
Patented March 13, 1888
Reproduced by
P. M. Cunningham
Madison, IN
Original from
private collection



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE TIN PLATE MILL, ST. LOUIS STAMPING COMPANY.—(See first page.)

From **Scientific American**
New York, Volume LXVI, Number 22
May 28,1892
Courtesy of Leo Winkler, Aurora, IL

INSIDE