

In the Tool Room

I spent some time recently working in the Headwaters Heritage Museum having “adopted” or become the caretaker for the “Blacksmith Room” upstairs in the museum. But it no longer holds just blacksmith tools. Except for a few items scattered among the other displays, most tools in the museum have migrated to what I am now calling the “Tool Room.” I have been photographing and matching photos to catalog just to get a feel for what’s in there. Some are pretty standard, some are mystifying, and some are amazing.

The museum has two anvils, one of which the center-piece of the Tool Room. This anvil weights 133 lbs. and was made in England. It is a “Peter Wright solid wrought” anvil and likely older than the building in which it is now housed. Donated by Marie Tinder in 1983, it once resided on the Tinder ranch in the lower Madison River valley. Eugene Mason Tinder came to Montana around 1887.

The other anvil, as discussed at the 2010 Fur Trade Symposium, is older than Montana’s gold rush, and according to Dr. James A. Hanson, may be the oldest American-made anvil in existence. Rather than wrought iron of Tinder family anvil, this anvil is made of cast-iron and thus lacks the distinctive ring of the wrought iron anvils.

Some of you may remember attending the send-off of the Great American Flatboat Expedition in 1976, one of the Bicentennial celebration events. The expedition had some trouble along the way, crashing into a bridge downriver and other hardships. But in 1982 the Great American Flatboat Expedition was credited for donating more than 100 items to the newly formed Three Forks Area Historical Society, including a hand-made carpenter’s block plane, circa 1800, which now resides in the Tool Room. It is one of sixteen carpenter’s planes in the collection.

Ralph and Katy Wilcox donated numerous items to the museum. Among them is a “TOOL, UNKNOWN.” It’s a strap of steel about 16 inches long with three pivoting straps attached to one end. It appears to be a lever / tightening

tool. Perhaps you can make the unknown known.

Each tool in the museum’s collection not only represents the era in which it was used, but each has its own “personal” history. What other heirloom did it help make or repair? Who used it? How many hands has it passed through to finally arrive here in the museum? So many mysteries and so many wonderful stories.



The Tinder family anvil.



The block plane donated by the Great American Flatboat Expedition.



The unknown tool.