NEW EXHIBIT: "Labor-saving Patented Inventions"

by Historical Society of Windham County Curator Joan Marr

As the 19th century progressed, general self-sufficient agriculture and the domestic manufacture of necessary goods gave way to specialization in work, cash purchases and the early industrial revolution.

Newfane's Walter Eager is a good example of this process in practice. He bought his farm in 1819 & after a few establishing years of all-around farming, he started to specialize in cattle & hay and bought his flour; he hired out or traded "on the halves" agricultural tasks like threshing or apple cidering, while he did more profitable professional work such as estate administration; and he mechanized. In 1834 he bought a cast-iron plough (some of the first made in Vermont were from Guilford); in 1846 he first used a corn cultivator; and in 1850 he "took a horse rake of Sawyer and Miller on trial". Efficiencies were also practiced on the domestic front, for example in 1836 he got "a cooking stove on trial at Goodrich & Atwood (in Townshend) $30.50 incl. pipe". In his diary he makes no mention of acquiring an improved butter churn, such as the one on display, made by George Holton of Jamaica, but considering that one year he sold in Boston $ 51 worth of butter at 13 cents a pound, it would have been useful.

The 1887 booklet "Brattleboro - Its Attractions as a Home" states "it has been a manufacturing town for twenty-five years". One of those responsible for the new industry was Calvin J. Weld, born in Guilford in 1830. He showed an interest in machinery from an early age: in an 1851 letter home he enquired *"about that plaining machiene which you wrote to old Gibson about and wheather you ever resieved eny answer from him or not, if you did not I would like to have you send him another Letter for if I can get the right I should like to go into it, that bilding which Alonzo said they wer agoing to have plaining works in is not finished, I can git a privilege very cheap I want you should come out here before I bye if it is so I can get the right of the mashiene."* In 1866 he bought the Luther Weld property & machine shop on Asylum St. in Brattleboro, and is listed in "Beers Atlas" as manufacturer of "Planers, Belt Saws and other Machinery". He held patents for fluting washboards, for improvements in washing- machines & in water regulators for boilers, for a shingle machine, & for a self-regulating water wheel, and, according to "Child's Gazetteer", manufactured the last two inventions. His wife's diary for 1881 has him away in Windham from the 20-24th December "to put in shingle mashein". How he powered his machine shop I have been unable to find out- please let me know if you know.

We have borrowed from the Brattleboro Historical Society a knitting machine made by the Bickford Knitting Co. From BHS's "Water Wheels and Steam Engines" I learnt that the company was formed in the Harmony Block in1875, and had moved to the Centerville factory by 1879.The mill itself was built in the 1860s by the New England Furniture Co, with water as "their principal source of power, but in the summer when the brook was low, the mill was powered by steam". Industries at the mill before the Knitting Co included the manufacture of axes, planing machines & knives; tools & machinery; and carriages. The Bickford Co. was a large concern, with capital of $150,000 and had shipped 1,000 machines to Russia. In 1899 the Centerville Mill was sold to the Brattleboro Street Railway Co. for a powerhouse, using "the water wheel on the Whetstone Brook to manufacture electricity for the trolly cars." Now that's a good idea that we could usefully revive today.